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THE TURK leaned close to the bound figure of Margo Lane. "Tell me who you are and who you work for? What were you snooping around for!"

"I won't tell you anything," Margo answered.

The Turk stared at Margo with a small smile on his dapper face, and spoke without turning.

"Get the razor." He continued to stare at the girl's face. "Such a pretty face. Very nice. Too bad, it don't look so good with scars. The nose don't look nice at all with a big scar."

Margo watched Turk, her eyes turned as far as they could to look at the shiny razor, the glistening edge. Turk leaned down close, the razor only inches from her face.

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MARK OF THE *Shadow*

MAXWELL GRANT

BELMONT BOOKS • NEW YORK CITY

MARK OF THE SHADOW

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Prologue: City In Battle

IT BEGAN in Santa Carla the day the mayor declared his war on crime. Organized crime was to be stamped out in Santa Carla. Destroyed, obliterated. No city in the country had ever accomplished this.

Santa Carla is the second largest city in the state. A beautiful city of palm trees and hibiscus, pine trees and bougainvillea. A busy city of expanding business and oil and rapid growth. The mountains stand brown and magnificent behind the city, the incredibly blue sea washes its beaches.

It became a battlefield.

Five men died suddenly in the streets within a few weeks.

There seemed little rhyme or reason to the killings. One victim was a known hoodlum. Another was a known gambler of the worst reputation. But the third was a bartender with no known criminal associations, and the fourth and fifth were solid, respected citizens.

All five died within a month of the mayor's declaration of war on crime in Santa Carla. All five were shot down on the public streets at night.

All five had been alone when they died.

None had been robbed.

In each case the police of Santa Carla could find no clues, no witnesses, no clear or immediate motive, no

marks of struggle, and no hint to the identities of the killers.

But there was no mistaking the signs—it had all the marks of an old-fashioned gang war. The citizens of Santa Carla were up in arms. And they were afraid.

They locked their doors at night.

When they had to walk the night streets of the city, they walked rapidly and looked behind them.

They were behind the mayor, but they were worried, afraid. The eyes of the entire state, even the nation, were on Santa Carla. The police seemed powerless to stop the deaths, or to find the killers.

There was talk, after the fourth killing, of an outside Crime Commission. The mayor backed his police all the way, but he admitted that the task was large.

Then there were two more deaths, killings. The city made up its mind. The crime commission was formed.

The first of the two killings that forced Santa Carla to call in outside help was not a murder. A man died, was killed, but it was not murder. Not to the citizens of Santa Carla, and not to the rest of the state or nation.

At one o'clock that morning the Santa Carla Police received a telephone call. The excited caller was the owner of a motel on the southern edge of the city. The owner's name was Max Goleta, the motel was named the El Capitan and the area was the worst in the city.

Max Goleta and his El Capitan Motel were well known to the police. But on this night it was Max Goleta who called the police to come to the El Capitan. The owner was alarmed.

"She's getting killed! Hurry! I heard shots!" Goleta shouted into the telephone from his office.

"Slow and straight, Max," the desk sergeant said into the telephone.

"In one of my cabins! Three shots! Everyone's yellin' out here," Goleta shouted.

"We're on our way," the desk sergeant said.

The police arrived at the El Capitan within five minutes. The crowd of frightened, screaming guests of the motel milled like sheep around a lighted cabin. Max Go-

leta himself met the police. The owner was abnormally agitated.

"Come on!" Goleta cried.

There were four policemen—two uniformed patrolmen and two detectives. The man in charge was Detective Lieutenant Joseph Moss.

It was Moss who entered the lighted cabin first.

The tall, distinguished man who stood alone in the center of the cabin living room smiled rather grimly at the detective. The man was grey-haired, well-dressed, and held a snub-nosed .38 caliber Police Special in his manicured hand.

Lieutenant Moss stared.

"Your Honor!"

"I have touched or moved nothing, Officer," the mayor said. "I did not leave the room. I waited exactly where I was until you came. That was correct, I believe?"

Moss nodded slowly. "Yes, Your Honor. That was correct. Can you . . . ?"

"He threatened me. He tried to kill me. I think you will find that his pistol has been fired once. The bullet should be in the wall just behind me."

Lieutenant Moss looked down at the floor for the first time. The dead man was a short, swarthy man in his fifties. Moss did not have to search for identification. The lieutenant knew the man on sight: even in death. Giorgio Fustelli, alias Jimmy Faust, alias Two-Finger Jim, alias Joe Fusto, alias so many other names Moss could not have remembered half of them without consulting the record. A known Mafia leader. A known killer. Moss looked at the mayor.

"He called me and suggested a meeting. He said to come alone, he had vital information for me," the mayor explained. "I suppose I should have expected a trap, but . . . Well, you know how anxious we are, er, Officer?"

"Moss, Sir. Detective Lieutenant Moss."

"Well, Moss, you know how it has been. I imagine I was too anxious. I did have the sense to come armed. He missed, I did not. I have a permit, of course."

Lieutenant Moss only nodded. He instructed his men to get to work on the normal homicide routine. They were

instructed to check every detail of the mayor's story. He took the mayor to headquarters himself. One thing puzzled Joe Moss.

"Goleta said it was a woman who was shot."

"Ridiculous. Did he see a woman shot?"

"No sir, but he swears he saw a woman go into the cabin before you arrived. He saw no man, and no one came out."

"I saw no woman," the mayor said, thoughtfully. "Still, as Goleta said, I arrived last. Perhaps she came with him and left before I came. Or perhaps Faust had her in another room, the bedroom. All I can tell you, Lieutenant, is that Faust called me and was here when I arrived."

Moss nodded. He had searched the bedroom, of course, and found nothing.

The mayor was released later that morning. It was a pure case of self-defense. Faust was no great loss. The citizens of Santa Carla were satisfied. The police thought the mayor had been foolish to take such a risk, and made him promise to never go alone on such an errand again, but they exonerated him completely. The physical evidence confirmed his story in full.

The mayor did not exonerate himself.

He insisted on suspending himself from office in favor of the deputy mayor pending a full inquiry and an official verdict. He insisted that even a mayor must follow the full letter of the law.

"That is what the law is for, gentlemen. No man can be above the law in any way."

The mayor was applauded, of course. As his last act until fully exonerated, the mayor suggested that the outside Crime Commission be called into the city.

The second killing made the City Council agree.

That same morning, no more than ten minutes after the police had received the frantic call from Max Goleta, the district attorney of Santa Carla, Drake Hind, was killed by a fusillade of shots as he slowed his car at a street corner to allow another car to pass in front.

The district attorney, it was determined, had been driving very fast through the city from his home when he had to slow at the intersection for the other car. There

was little doubt that the other car had been part of a trap to kill Drake Hind.

A man, acting suspiciously near the scene of the murder of the district attorney, was captured in a police dragnet. The man was found to be a suspected member of the Mafia in Santa Carla. The man was arrested at once.

The next day the Crime Commission was impounded.

And that was really when it all began.

1

THE CITY JAIL of Santa Carla occupies the top four floors of the Courthouse Building. It is a tall, modern building in sharp contrast to the Spanish style architecture of the rest of the official buildings of the city. It is not a maximum security institution, since it is intended only for holding prisoners awaiting trial. Or prisoners awaiting not trial but interrogation. Or, perhaps, awaiting something no one else could know.

Vita Maggiore was waiting for something. The suspected Mafia man, suspected participant in the killing of District Attorney Hind, sat on his bunk in the cell of the city jail and talked to himself. He talked softly, steadily, half in English and half in Italian. He talked as if to quell a great fear.

"All right. So he kiss," and he swore in Italian. "A kiss. So? He kissed me, *compare*, why not?"

Vito Maggiore stood up, paced the dark and narrow cell like a caged animal.

"No, like that a kiss it is not *compare!*"

Maggiore stopped in the center of the dark cell.

"The kiss, *mio Dio!* The kiss!"

As if this were something too hard to bear, Maggiore seemed to stagger where he stood. He swayed. The small, swarthy man reached out to catch hold and found nothing but air. He took two steps on his shaky legs, and sat heavily on the single bunk again. Then he swore.

"Coward! Pig! What must be must be. *Che será, será!*"

He seemed to change actual physical shape as he sat there on the narrow bunk in the silent cell. He grew taller, sat stronger and straighter. Down the dim corridor outside the cell a man moaned. Someone somewhere whim-

pered. Maggiore smiled, curled his lips in a sneer. Women! No, not him. *Che será, será!* Maggiore lay down on the bunk, his hands steady, his eyes cold but no longer afraid.

He lay there for a long minute. His eyes closed in readiness for peaceful sleep.

The laugh came from nowhere.

An eerie laugh that had no source, no direction.

A weird, chilling laugh that hung like a cloud in the dim cell.

Maggiore jerked awake.

"What? Who the . . ."

Maggiore lay rigid, his eyes darting like the eyes of a trapped rabbit.

The cold, mirthless laugh came again. Vito Maggiore sat up on the narrow bunk, all the fear returned to his eyes. He stared frantically around the dim cell.

"Where are you? What is this? *Mio Dio,* I go crazy!"

Maggiore grasped his head in both his hands, the hands on his temples, pressing against his temples as if to squeeze out the sound of the chilling laugh that came from nowhere. The eyes of the swarthy man were closed as if to hide from the eerie laugh that filled the silent cell.

"You are not insane, Vito Maggiore!"

The voice, like the laugh, floated in the dim cell like a wraith without source.

"You do not imagine this voice, Maggiore. This voice is not an illusion you can escape behind closed eyes."

Maggiore shook his head. He held his head in both hands, eyes closed tight in the dark cell.

"No . . . no . . . no . . ."

The voice was grim. "Open your eyes, Vito Maggiore!"

Maggiore shook his head, covered his ears now. His eyes tightly closed, the swarthy prisoner turned to the wall, huddled on the narrow bunk, ears covered to shut out the voice.

"Maggiore!" the voice commanded. A stern voice that shook the dim cell.

On the bunk Maggiore lay rigid, huddled, turned away from the voice. Then, imperceptibly at first, the small

prisoner moved, shivered. Maggiore shuddered, his whole body straining. He strained to lie where he was, but his body moved, began to turn on the narrow bunk.

"Sit up!" the unseen voice commanded.

Maggiore turned on the bunk. His hands came away from his ears. His eyes opened. He sat on the edge of the bunk. His eyes blinked as if he knew he did not want to do what he was doing but could not help himself. His mind would not obey him. A thick cloud seemed to fog his mind. He blinked, and did what the strange voice commanded.

"Look at me!"

Maggiore looked. His eyes, blinking still, trying to understand what was happening to him, turned as if drawn by some powerful magnet. The cloud in his mind thinned and thickened as if he stood on a swirling misty moor. Now, as his eyes turned toward the voice, drawn to the voice, the mist thinned in his mind.

Vita Maggiore looked and moaned softly.

Before him across the dim cell he saw a looming shape —a black, vague, indistinct shape that seemed to emerge from the darkness, that seemed to be part of the dark itself. A shape, figure, that seemed to flow and blend into the shadows, that seemed to have come from the stone walls themselves. A dark shadow that towered over him.

Then Maggiore saw the face—and the eyes.

A face and two burning eyes that floated above him in the dark cell. The cell itself seemed suddenly much darker, and only the fiery eyes glowed. Hard, piercing eyes that had a light of their own, and at the same time glowed with the reflected red light of a jewel that shined on the finger of a long, thin hand.

The glow of the strange ring illuminated the head and shoulders of the figure that stood before Vito Maggiore. The weird light revealed a face with a strong, hawklike nose below the piercing eyes. The eyes stared at Maggiore from beneath the brim of a wide black slouch hat. The high collar of a black cloak hid the face below the sharp nose. A sweeping black cloak shrouded the figure and faded away to blend into the dark of the cell.

The towering figure moved. Silently it seemed to glide

closer to Vito Maggiore. The swarthy prisoner stared up, his mind clearer, aware of the powerful shape before him. And yet, somehow, unable to move, unable to scream the scream that welled up in his throat. A scream that suddenly vanished from his mind, and, in an instant, Maggiore felt calm, almost peaceful. He looked up at the figure. Aware that his mind, somehow, was no longer under his control. Almost glad that he was free of the necessity to control himself.

"Who . . . who are you?"

The looming shape stared down at Vito Maggiore.

"Men call me The Shadow, Vito Maggiore. I destroy evil. I battle for good and justice!"

Calm now, Maggiore nodded. "Yes, justice. What do you want from me?"

"The truth, Vito Maggiore! I want the truth!"

Maggiore nodded again. "The truth, yes."

"I want to know how Drake Hind met his death. Who killed him and why?"

Maggiore blinked. "Hind? Who killed him?"

"Who!"

Maggiore shook his head as if to clear it. "I . . . I don't know."

"Do not try to lie to me!" the voice of the looming black figure said harshly.

"No," Maggiore said. "I don't know. Who or why, I don't know . . . I don't know."

The eyes of The Shadow stared down at the small man on the cell bunk. Maggiore seemed confused, puzzled, as if he had not known until this moment that he truly did *not* know who had killed Drake Hind or why. The Shadow's sharp eyes narrowed as he watched the small prisoner.

"Why did Faust try to kill the mayor?" the dark Avenger queried.

"Faust? I don't know," Maggiore said.

"Why were you at the place where Drake Hind was killed?"

"I don't know."

The harsh laugh of The Shadow echoed through the si-

lent cell. The cloaked Avenger moved closer to Maggiore, his face close to the small prisoner.

"You don't know why you were there!"

Maggiore rubbed his eyes, looked up, shook his head. "I'm not sure. I was there, yes, but . . . why? I don't . . . remember."

The blazing eyes of The Shadow bored down into the small prisoner. Maggiore seemed genuinely confused. As if the small gangster were trying to remember exactly what he had been doing at the scene of Drake Hind's murder. The Shadow, his keen mind sharply analytical behind his grim visage, studied the swarthy prisoner. Somehow he felt that the man was telling the truth.

"You don't know why you were there?" The Shadow intoned.

Maggiore blinked. "I . . . I was having a drink, yeah. She was a looker, yeah, a real looker. I remember. I had some drinks, a couple, yeah. Only . . . I must of had more than a couple . . . I mean, she was a looker, yeah. Then . . . then I had to go, some business, you know? A little business. Then . . . I was there, the cops, they picked me up, I . . ."

Maggiore trailed off, his voice fading, his eyes going blank as he stared up at the towering shape of The Shadow. The cloud in his mind seemed suddenly to grow thicker. He felt a pressure, a pushing in his brain, like a giant hand pressing down. The eyes of The Shadow bored through him.

"The cops picked you up!" The Shadow said. "Then you must have been there for a reason. You killed Drake Hind!"

"No!" Maggiore said, but there was as much question in it as statement. "No, I'd remember. Only the cops got me, I mean, I must have done something. I mean . . ."

"You are a member of The Mafia?" The Shadow suddenly snapped.

Maggiore nodded. "Yeah, I . . . what?! No . . . no . . ."

The swarthy prisoner was on his feet. Suddenly, his face contorted and drained almost white. There was a look of complete horror on his face as he stared at The

Shadow, his brain for an instant clear again. The shock of what he had just done. He had admitted what no member of the "family" could ever admit—that he was a member! The unforgivable. The unpardonable. For an instant, under the shock, his brain cleared and he stared at the dark shape with the fiery eyes in front of him.

"No! I never hear about no Mafia!"

The Shadow laughed his chilling laugh. His eyes bored into the mind of the swarthy little prisoner. The power of his mind reached out to cloud, envelop, control the mind of the man in front of him. The great power learned so long ago in the Orient from the Master Chen T'a Tze. The unique power given to The Shadow by the Master himself, its source known only to the Master and, now, The Shadow.

"You are Mafia! Who is your chief? Who are the men who give you your orders!" The Shadow demanded, his powers enfolding the mind of the Mafia man before him.

But Vito Maggiore was conditioned from the day of his birth by the black hand of the malignant and world-wide brotherhood of crime. As The Shadow's powers invaded his mind, breaking down all his will and his resistance, reaching to take all that he knew, the small man resisted with all his strength. This was the ultimate test for a *mafioso*. The Shadow had asked the final forbidden question—had asked him to name, betray, his brothers, his leaders.

"No! I know nothing!"

The Shadow fixed the man with his eyes like a worm on a sharp pin. "You know! You will tell me!"

Caught between the powers of The Shadow which no man could defeat or resist for long, and the powers of all that he had learned and believed and sworn to in a lifetime, Vito Maggiore had nowhere else to go. He must succumb to the power of The Shadow, betray his brotherhood, or . . .

Vito Maggiore, in a final effort of will before the clouds of The Shadow's power closed completely over his mind and rendered him helpless, bent to the top button of the two on his left jacket sleeve.

The Shadow leaped forward.

Maggiore muttered a prayer—and a sharp, strangled cry.

When The Shadow bent over him, Vito Maggiore was already a dead man, the smell of bitter almonds on his lifeless lips.

Erect in the dim cell, looking down at the dead man, The Shadow had to admire the power of the Mafia Brotherhood. Cyanide in the coat button. The Mafia had defeated him this time, but there would be other times. He crouched to search the lifeless form of Vito Maggiore. He found nothing. The police had taken everything—except a cyanide coat button!

Voices came along the corridor.

The Shadow straightened up. The guards, probably hearing the single strangled cry of Vito Maggiore, were coming down the corridor. The cry had not been loud, the guards probably thought there was nothing particularly wrong, they were not hurrying. But they would begin to hurry when they saw what was in the cell. The Shadow blended into the darkness of a corner of the cell.

Two guards appeared in front of the cell. They peered into the dimness. One of them pointed to Maggiore sprawled face down on the narrow bunk.

"Look at him! Killed the DA, and sleeps like a baby!"

The other guard peered more closely, saw Maggiore's left hand dangling off the bunk. The guard called sharply.

"Maggiore!"

The body on the bunk did not stir. The first guard stared.

"He's not breathing!"

Swearing, the two guards reached for the keys and stepped to open the door. Then they looked at each other. The cell door was open. Quickly the two guards rushed into the cell and up to the body. They bent over Maggiore, felt his pulse, and saw the blue cast of his lips.

One of the guards suddenly straightened, turned. He blinked as he stared at a dim corner of the cell. His partner looked up at him.

"What is it?"

The guard who stared at the dim corner shook his head. He rubbed his eyes.

"I don't know. I swear I saw something move."

This guard stepped to the dark corner. He saw nothing. He touched the walls with his hands, looked back and forth, up and down. He rubbed his eyes again and turned to look at the open cell door.

"Something dark. Big and dark, like a . . . a shadow! A moving shadow. I swear I saw it move, go out the door. Like part of the cell moving, going out."

His partner watched him. "You sure you're feeling okay?"

"I don't know. I feel funny. But I saw something!"

"Okay!"

"Someone killed Maggiore!"

"No," the first guard said. "Suicide. A button on his coat. It's still in his mouth."

"Suicide?"

"Yeah. A Mafia out."

The guard who thought he had seen a shadow move looked at the dead man, and then at the cell door.

"But the door was open."

The first guard looked at the door. "Yeah, it was open. Only there was no one in here, and no one could have gotten out past us. He could have gotten out of the cell, but not out of the corridor."

The two guards thought about this before they turned to go and report the death of Vito Maggiore.

At the far end of the jail corridor, the single guard remaining at his post beyond the last barred door looked up a moment later. This guard stared at the closed and barred window near him. The guard was sure that something had passed him, something like a puff of wind.

He saw nothing, and the window was closed. He checked the door into the cell block. It was closed and locked. The guard decided that he was coming down with a cold, had felt a sudden chill.

One floor down, in a corridor in the top floor of the courthouse building before it became the jail, there was a

locked store room. No one saw the dark shape pause for a second at the door, open it, and disappear inside.

In the store room, the door locked behind him. The Shadow did not pause. He glided, a dark phantom shape, across the storeroom. He faded into the black of a rear corner. Moments later the black corner seemed to move and The Shadow returned—but it was not The Shadow. The figure that came out of the black where The Shadow had gone was a different person.

The new man seemed smaller than The Shadow, stockier and shorter, although he was actually none of these things. Instead of the burning eyes of The Shadow, the new man had hooded eyes, impassive in the dim room. His face that betrayed no emotions, and his half-closed eyes, had a quiet, thoughtful aspect. A quiet, steady, passive face where the face of The Shadow was all power and vitality. And yet, with all the differences, the short-cropped grey hair, the impeccable business suit, the features of the new man seemed to strangely resemble the hawklike features of The Shadow.

This was not a coincidence. The man now in the room was Lamont Cranston, wealthy socialite and international businessman, close friend and helper of Police Commissioner Ralph Weston of New York, well-known amateur criminologist—and the major alter-ego The Shadow presented to the world to hide his true identity. There were only a few who knew that The Shadow and Lamont Cranston were one and the same. Only the members of the cloaked Avenger's far-flung secret organization, that small but powerful army of dedicated crime fighters, knew that their chief and Lamont Cranston were the same. There were none, no one on Earth, who knew what the true identity of The Shadow was. Only two had ever known—The Shadow himself, and his master Chen T'a Tze. Now, with the Master long dead, only The Shadow himself knew who he really was. And it did not matter who he had been, what man he had been born. That man was gone. The Shadow was, now, only The Shadow—a cloaked instrument of good and justice in an evil world, a man of many faces across the world. Now he was Lamont Cranston.

Lamont Cranston, standing in the dim storeroom, listened to the sounds out in the corridor. His super hearing waited for what he wanted to hear. Then he heard it —the members of the newly appointed crime commission, summoned by the report of the death of Maggiore, were passing along the corridor toward the stairs up to the jail.

Cranston waited. Then he opened the door and stepped out into the corridor. The members of the commission were just ahead. One of them turned as Cranston approached.

"Ah, Lamont, you got my message! I was afraid you might not join us in time," Commissioner Weston of New York said.

"In time, Commissioner?" Cranston said quietly. "Has something happened?"

"I'll say it has! Maggiore killed himself!"

With the eyes of all the members of the commission on him, Cranston feigned great surprise. Inwardly, he was doing two very different things: he was studying the faces of the commission members; and he was thinking about what he, as The Shadow, had learned from Vito Maggiore.

But Cranston was not the only man thinking, at that precise moment, about what had been learned from Vito Maggiore.

2

AT THIS HOUR the street in front of the Santa Carla Courthouse and City Jail was dark and deserted. Traffic that passed was light, and did not slow down, passing from one major highway through the city to another. The area was old, a place of slums and cheap rooming houses. An area of old brick buildings built in past days when the state was young, when there had been gold and silver and few men gave their right names. A place of cheap tav-

erns, shabby pool halls, the barren eating places of the poor and vagrant. An area of dark doorways recessed into old buildings.

In one of these dark doorways, directly across from the marble steps of the tall courthouse building, there was a man. He was hidden, and he was watching the steps of the courthouse. From time to time this man stepped closer to the front of the doorway and looked up toward the high windows of the city jail above. When he stepped out it could be seen, if there had been anyone to see, that he was a thin, dapper man of average height. Neat, well-dressed, smooth-faced and well-cared-for, the man's iron-grey hair made him look not unlike any other prosperous and respected businessman.

But his eyes were not the eyes of a quiet businessman. His eyes were small, flat, hard and cruel. Deadly eyes that looked up toward the windows of the jail with no expression at all. Cold eyes that stared coldly, calculating, up to the jail above. He seemed to be waiting. Watching and waiting, his eyes moving slowly over a period of time from the jail above to the wide marble steps of the courthouse below. He seemed to be not only waiting, but expecting something.

The dapper man had been hidden in the doorway for many hours.

He had come to the doorway directly from inside the courthouse itself. In the courthouse he had visited the jail. He was the only visitor a man in the cell next to Vito Maggiore had had. The records showed that he was the lawyer of the man in the cell next to Maggiore. The records showed that his name was Max Beers. His name was not Max Beers, he was not a lawyer, he did not know the man in the cell next to Maggiore, except by name, and he had not actually visited the man in the next cell. He had visited Vito Maggiore. He had talked to Vito Maggiore while he was, supposedly, talking to the man in the next cell. He had done this well, cleverly, with no one suspecting that his voice was loud in the next cell so that Maggiore could hear him. Before he left, he had stopped in front of Maggiore's cell. He had called Maggiore to the bars of the cell door. He had, through the bars, kissed

Vito Maggiore. He had kissed Maggiore once, and smiled at Maggiore, and left.

He had come straight to the doorway across the street to wait.

Now, some hours later, he still stood in the doorway. He smoked. No emotion showed on his thin, well-cared-for face. No anxiety, no weariness, no impatience. He just stood, smoked, and waited. For much of the time he did not even move. Only his hand, raising and lowering his cigarette. Motionless, hidden, he watched the people go in and out of the courthouse building. He was so quiet, so still, that the few people who passed the doorway did not even suspect that he was there. From time to time the dapper man let his cold eyes rove along the entire street, studying the buildings, the other doorways, the alleys. He saw nothing that disturbed him. He was satisfied. He continued his waiting, sure that he was unobserved.

He waited in the doorway precisely four hours. Then he smiled. What he had been waiting for happened.

A bright light went on above in the window of a cell. Far off above there were voices. Loud voices and many voices. A few moments later an ambulance screamed up with its siren wailing frantically. Two men in white ran into the rear entrance of the courthouse. Soon after the car of the mayor arrived. The mayor himself ran up the steps of the courthouse. Moments after that four reporters, known to the man in the doorway, hurried out of the courthouse and ran to their cars. Next to arrive was an assistant district attorney, Gerald Symes, who was now DA after the death of Drake Hind. The man in the doorway watched it all. The man stepped from the doorway. He smiled. He took out a long, thin cigar and lighted it. He puffed contentedly and laughed once aloud. He spoke once, aloud.

"*Grazie*, Vito, *compare mio*. Sleep well."

Smiling, the dapper man turned away and walked briskly to the nearest corner. A long, black car seemed to materialize from nowhere. The thin, dapper man stepped into the car and closed the door. The car pulled away, moving slowly and in no hurry. When it reached the next

corner it turned and vanished. No one in the car observed the next events on the street in front of the courthouse.

The instant the car turned into the cross street, a man on a motorcycle emerged from an alley not far from the doorway where the dapper man had been hidden. The motorcyclist was a small, slender man with a beard, goggles, and wearing a black leather jacket. His longish, dark hair streamed out in the wind as he turned the motorcycle after the black car. His booted feet kicked the cycle around the corner after the black car, and, in turn, he vanished from the courthouse street.

Before the bearded cyclist had made his turn, a United States Mail truck appeared on the street from behind the courthouse. The mail truck seemed to hesitate, as if the driver were deciding which way to turn, and then, casually, the truck turned in the same direction as the black car and the motorcycle. It went around the corner only seconds later than the motorcycle. For some blocks the mail truck continued to follow the motorcycle. After ten blocks the bearded cyclist had come close behind the black car. The mail truck was still behind the motorcycle. In this order, the three vehicles proceeded along the streets of Santa Carla. In the mail truck, the driver, wearing the blue uniform of the United States Post Office Department, flicked a switch on his dashboard and picked up an innocent-seeming dashboard cigarette lighter.

"Code Ten, urgent. Agent 3, Harry Vincent. Come in Control Central. Code Ten, calling Burbank, Control Central. Agent 3, Harry Vincent."

The driver watched the motorcycle and the black car ahead. The traffic was now heavy in the center of Santa Carla. But the black car appeared neither alarmed nor in a hurry. The cyclist was able to follow with care, and the mail truck followed the cyclist while the driver of the truck continued to make his call over the hidden radio.

"Code Ten direct. Come in Control Central."

It was a dim blue-lighted room hidden high in the Park Avenue office building. A man, all but hidden by the blue light of the room, bent over a large, rectangular instrument that seemed to glow a deeper blue in the room. On

the instrument there were dials and gauges and a round grid that was a speaker. The man in the blue room operated the instrument without touching it—it was an advanced, unique communications machine that operated only when a peculiar ring on the hand of the man was passed over it.

"Report, Agent 3! Burbank, Central Control."

The blue glow filled the room as if it came from the walls and ceiling themselves—but no walls or ceiling were visible. Only the man, and the communications machine that hummed softly. No entrance or exit could be seen. No sound entered the blue room. No vibrations. No movement. As if the blue room did not exist on this Earth, but floated somewhere in space. And, in fact, the blue room did not exist, not to anyone but the few members of The Shadow's Organization who knew it was there. It appeared on no plans, existed on no directory. There were no entrances or exits known to anyone but The Shadow, his secretary and First Agent, Margo Lane, and Burbank, the communications agent who never left the city. Secret as it was, this blue room was only one of the blue-lighted rooms hidden behind the elegant facade of the New York offices of Lamont Cranston Enterprises, Inc. The other rooms were known only to The Shadow himself. The headquarters of The Shadow were the ultimate in security—unseen, unknown, and unsuspected. They had never been entered by an enemy.

The voice of the distant mailman, Harry Vincent, Agent 3 of The Shadow, entered the room. "Observation of exterior of Santa Carla Courthouse resulted in identification of two other men also observing. One, a thin, grey-haired man watched for four hours until arrival of mayor, DA Gerald Symes, and ambulance. This man then left and entered a black car. The second watcher is a bearded young man riding a motorcycle. He is now following the black car. I am following both men. Will continue surveillance, report again later."

"Very good, Agent Vincent," Burbank said.

The communications expert passed his fiery ring, a replica of the glowing ring on the hand of The Shadow worn by all agents of the far-flung organization, over the large

console. The room became silent. Burbank passed the ring across another sensor on the console. The report was immediately repeated from its permanent tape that would eventually enter the vast files of The Shadow. Burbank Passed the ring a third time. The console hummed again.

"Burbank reporting to chief. Burbank, Code 10. Direct relay to chief."

In the blue room the console continued to hum in the total silence of its hidden location in the heart of the great city.

Behind the courthouse in Santa Carla a man wearing the uniform of a chauffeur lounged as if asleep in the front seat of a black Rolls-Royce limousine. The man was not asleep. He was alert and observing all that went on around him. Beneath his trim chauffeur's uniform was an automatic he knew how to use. The chauffeur gave no outward sign as a tiny light glowed now on the dashboard of the Rolls-Royce. Casually, he took out the dashboard cigarette lighter, passed his small, glowing ring in front of the dash.

"Stanley, Agent 2."

"Burbank, Control Central," a soft voice said from nowhere. "Report from Agent 3 for the chief."

"Chief unavailable."

"Accept report on tape," the voice of the distant Burbank said.

The chauffeur passed his ring over the glove compartment of the Rolls-Royce. "Report."

When the report was finished, tape to tape, the chauffeur shut off his equipment and waited a long minute. His alert eyes made certain he was unobserved. Then he slowly began to run the glowing ring on his finger until it blazed brighter. After a time, the glow died from the ring, and the chauffeur went back to his feigned sleep in the front seat of the Rolls-Royce.

Lamont Cranston sat silently against the wall of the large, oppulent conference room on the highest floor of the courthouse beneath the city jail. Nothing showed on his impassive face as he listened to the members of the

crime commission going, once more, over the strange death of Vito Maggiore. He could say nothing. Only The Shadow knew what had happened, and the secret of The Shadow was not known even to Police Commissioner Weston. It was a secret that could never be revealed.

Where he sat, Cranston could hear even the smallest whisper at the long conference table where the commission members discussed the events. His hearing was the super-hearing of The Shadow. As Cranston, or any of the many alter-egoes of The Shadow, he had all the powers and skills and knowledge of the black-cloaked Avenger—except one. Cranston had the hearing, the power of seeing in the dark, the total muscular control of his body that could even change his face by an act of will, the skill to deal instant death with his hands, all the occult and mysterious secrets learned with so much effort in his years in the Orient. But he did not have the power of The Shadow to cloud men's minds, to render them helpless before the glow of his eyes.

The power to cloud men's minds, learned so long ago from the great Chen T'a Tze, required the secret black cloak, the black slouch hat, and the fire-opal girasol ring. The power was not in these things, it was a power of the mind, its source not known even to Chen T'a Tze, but it could not be used without the cloak, the dark hat, the glowing ring on the long finger of The Shadow. These things had been presented to The Shadow by the dying hand of the Master himself. Only one man in each generation could have this power. Chen T'a Tze had selected The Shadow to use the power well. The dark Avenger had never failed the trust.

Now, he listened to the deliberations of the commission in his role as special assistant to Police Commissioner Weston who had been named a member of the crime commission. The secret garb of The Shadow was secure inside his clothes, undetectable in its hidden pockets. There to be used instantly if the time came for The Shadow to appear. Even now, as he sat impassive, his hooded eyes seemingly relaxed, he was aware of the faint sound of the girasol ring. Stanley was alerting him to a report for The Shadow. But he could not accept the re-

port now. It would keep. He concentrated his passive gaze on the members of the crime commission ranged aroung the long table, their assistants behind him even as he was.

There were four members of the crime commission, each a man of ability and great reputation.

Chairman was Walter Bedsole Bailey, the financier, stockbroker, adviser of presidents. Twice state crime commissioner of this state; three times federal special assistant to the Congress; chief of three different war planning boards. A man not young, but not as old by far as would have been expected from his long record of distinguished service. Because Walter Bedsole Bailey had been a millionaire, a leader of business, at the age of twenty-five! Now nearly sixty, the tall, ramrod straight man, his hair almost white, was an imposing figure, and he ran the special commission with cool efficiency.

Morgan Slater, Professor of Criminology at Chase University in Ohio, and former chief of Ohio State Police. A cold-eyed, physically powerful man of fifty-five with jet black hair that had no trace of grey, Slater was a man who had actually dealt hand-to-hand with criminals, and who was also perhaps the most informed authority on crime in the country. In Ohio, where he was known to police and hoodlum alike as "Sir Henry" Morgan, Slater had made his State Police a model of hard, ruthless, but impeccably clean efficiency. As a professor, no one knew more about the field.

The small, wiry, pipe-smoking man was Samuel Bauermann, noted attorney and former federal judge. One of the most brilliant attorneys ever to practice criminal law in the country, Bauermann was the exact opposite of both "Sir Henry" Morgan Slater, and Walter Bedsole Bailey—an open, smiling, deceptively jolly little man. To look at Bauermann, and to talk to him before he was ready to work on you, was to feel you were talking to some not-very-bright shopkeeper with a happily stupid disposition. Bauermann was far from stupid, or even happy. (Clarence Darrow himself had once said that if you had an impossible case, come to him. If it was a hopeless case, go to Sam Bauermann.) As a judge Bauermann had been equal-

ly brilliant, and a stern dispenser of law. But he had abruptly left the federal bench, saying that there were a lot of good judges to sentence the guilty, and not enough lawyers to defend the innocent. No longer needing money, Samuel Bauermann devoted his work to defending only men accused of the highest crimes and who had no money.

The fourth member of the special crime commission in Santa Carla was Police Commissioner Ralph Weston of New York. The socially prominent Commissioner Weston was a recognized expert on all police matters and a confidant of presidents. A close personal friend of Lamont Cranston, and a fellow member of the ultra-exclusive Cobalt Club in New York, Weston had selected Cranston as his personal assistant with the special crime commission. (Influenced by the powers of The Shadow in this choice, but unaware of this.) The other commission members each had assistants also. Chairman Bailey's special assistant was a well-known private detective named Allen Richards, a small, compact, slender man who had built his agency from a one man operation into a powerful organization of trained investigators that operated nationwide. Both Richards and Cranston had status as Special Investigators with the commission. The other two members, Slater and Bauermann, had contented themselves with appointing their personal private secretaries, both attractive and efficient young ladies, as their assistants.

It was Allen Richards, the slender assistant to Chairman Bailey, who opened the serious discussion in the elegant conference room.

"Well, it seems obvious now that we have a full-fledged Mafia war on our hands, eh, gentlemen?"

3

BEHIND HIS impassive eyes, Lamont Cranston studied the faces of the Commission members. They all seemed to agree with the statement of Richards. It was a reasonable

statement—from the facts they knew. But Cranston, in possession of the knowledge of The Shadow about the death of Maggiore, was not quite so sure. There had been, well, peculiarities.

"You think, then," Weston said, "that it is the Mafia who killed Hind, and the others, in a battle against the clean-up campaign of the mayor? That the suicide of Maggiore proves this?"

Richards nodded. "It seems the only conclusion, Commissioner."

"A typical Mafia pattern," Chairman Bailey said. "Bribery, murder, and, when captured, suicide to protect the brotherhood."

Weston looked at Cranston. "Lamont? What do you think?"

"As Mr. Bailey says, Commissioner, it is the typical pattern," Cranston agreed, his face impassive. "Still, there are some unanswered questions. For instance, the police have not actually found any proof that Maggiore killed, or was involved in any way, with Drake Hind."

"True, Mr. Cranston," Samuel Bauermann said. "No one has convinced me that Maggiore did anything yet."

Bailey laughed. "Come, come, Sam! Let's not carry your defense of the innocent too far."

"The defense of the innocent can never be carried too far, Walter," Bauermann said evenly.

"Now, Sam, Maggiore was obviously a Mafia man. Can the Mafia ever be innocent?" Bailey chided.

"Yes, Walter, they can," Bauermann chided in return. "The Mafia like anyone else is innocent until proven guilty. That is our law. In fact that is our greatest gift to mankind. We do not, theoretically, believe in guilt by association. Not even Mafia association."

Morgan Slater laughed harshly. "Sir Henry" looked at the small, mild-mannered lawyer. Bauermann met his hard look with an equally hard return stare. Morgan Slater laughed again.

"If we did not believe in guilt by association, Sam," Slater said, "about eighty percent of police work couldn't be done and you know it. We'd never make an arrest if we didn't assume that if you associate with criminals,

and criminal organizations, you are probably a criminal. We wouldn't make many arrests if we didn't assume a man guilty until he proves he is innocent."

"That, Morgan, is police work. Perhaps it is even proper for the police to assume guilt, and operate on guilt by association. But the courts, the jury, and the citizens must operate on the other principles. In a very real sense, Morgan, it is the job of courts, juries, and citizens to protect their fellow citizens from the police!"

Commissioner Weston nodded a slow agreement with the wiry lawyer. Morgan Slater was about to make an angry rejoinder, when Chairman Bailey held up his hand.

"Come, come, gentlemen. Very interesting, but we are not here to be a debating society. We will leave that to the theorists and the men who write books. We are here to deal with a crime war in Santa Carla!"

There was a silence. Bailey nodded approval.

"Good. Then we have a Mafia war against the city. Or can anyone present some other explanation?"

Morgan Slater rubbed his powerful chin. "There is no evidence of police corruption. The force is a fine one, if a little too small for the job. I can find no hint of venality on the part of the police, the DA's office, or the mayor's office."

"What about the state organizations?" Weston asked.

"I found nothing," Slater said.

Chairman Bailey frowned. The distinguished financier seemed worried. He turned to his special investigator, Allen Richards. The slender private detective seemed equally concerned. It was Bailey who finally spoke.

"I'm not so sure, Morgan. I had Allen there do a little investigating for me privately. I fear there may be some hint of bribery in the State Police."

Richards leaned forward. "We're not too sure of the governor himself, there are some associations of his I don't quite like. Everyone knows that the Mafia is strong in the capital city. You know the governor favors legal gambling."

Lamont Cranston stood up. He stood quietly, his face composed, revealing nothing of the fiery mind of The

Shadow that was working behind the facade of Cranston. The socialite spoke softly, calmly.

"We are missing the actual details of the murders. We are assuming that the last two are in the pattern of the first five, but they are not. Consider them. They don't fit the pattern. They were not single men shot down on the street without clues of any kind. In addition, they don't fit a Mafia pattern. It is most unusual for a Mafia member to be caught wandering around the scene of his crime!"

Slater looked at Bailey. "Cranston has a point. He's right, you know? The Brotherhood is customarily much more efficient than that."

"Which brings us to the mayor's meeting with Faust," Cranston said quietly. "They were not particularly efficient there, either."

"You're not suggesting that . . ." Bailey began.

"I'm not suggesting anything, Mr. Bailey, only that for such an experienced criminal organization, they appear to have been somewhat inefficient in these two cases."

"Which means," Slater snapped, "that you suspect some form of collusion! I mean, what other alternative is there?"

Samuel Bauermann laughed softly. "I think, my dear Morgan, that Mr. Cranston is suggesting that there is another alternative. If I am correct, he is suggesting that perhaps our friends in the Mafia have some reason for being so abnormally clumsy."

Cranston smiled at the wiry little lawyer. "Yes, I had something of that nature in mind. What I am really suggesting, gentlemen, is that there is more here than meets the immediate eye. Something, well, peculiar. I can't put my finger on it, if I could it wouldn't be odd or peculiar, but I feel that something is not normal."

Weston pressed the point. "But in what way, Lamont?"

"I don't know. It could be just unusual clumsiness, mistakes caused by haste, fear or panic on the part of the Mafia here. Or it could be some devious scheme of the Brotherhood. Or it could even be that there is some sort of battle *within* the Mafia that has made them act oddly. Then, it could be that the Mafia is not really involved!"

There was another silence. The distinguished and experienced members of the crime commission looked at each other, and seemed to nod to themselves. It was obvious that they were impressed by Cranston's logical presentation, if not completely by his points. Allen Richards looked at the four commission members, then at Cranston.

"I think we can't escape the fact that the Mafia is involved," Richards said slowly, rubbing his smooth face. "Maggiore was without a doubt Mafia, and we *know* Faust was. We also know that the mayor was in an open war on organized crime, and in this state, if not in the whole country, that means first and foremost, The Mafia."

The slender investigator paused, looked at Cranston. "But I'll add one more point to Cranston's analysis. The two crimes don't really fit the Mafia method of operation. Now, they could have changed their usual MO, for one of the reasons Cranston has suggested, or for some other reason, but neither incident really fits their ways—too risky. You see? The Mafia is known for its care, especially in a killing. To gun down a man as well known as Drake Hind on a public street is not their way. Nor is setting up such a clumsy meeting—with Faust apparently alone! They usually prefer better odds than one to one."

Chairman Bailey studied his special investigator. The great industrialist and political advisor seemed to be weighing what Richards had said.

"I see, Allen. Yes, you may be right. Perhaps we need more evidence before we mount any form of counter measures."

Cranston shifted in his seat. "There is also one more major point we seem to be evading. A point Richards just hinted at, in a way. The woman."

"Woman?" Morgan Slater said.

They all appeared puzzled for a moment.

"The woman in the police report," Cranston said. "The woman who was seen by the motel owner, Max Goleta, but was seen by no one else, and was not found by the police. Lieutenant Moss, the reporting officer, seemed particularly puzzled by Max Goleta reporting on the telephone that the victim was a woman, when, in fact, it was

a man. The report of Moss says that while Goleta is a man of rather low reputation, the owner is an experienced observer."

"Panic," Morgan Slater said. "I've seen it a hundred times. Especially in men like that punk. Confusion, scared of being involved with the police himself."

"You think that there was no woman?" Bailey asked Slater.

"For once I tend to agree with Morgan," Samuel Bauermann said.

Weston was doubtful. But Allen Richards solved the matter. The slender investigator smiled and took out his notebook. He flipped pages, stopped.

"As a matter of fact, gentlemen, I anticipated Mr. Cranston, and looked into it. There was indeed a woman. We found her. She went to Lieutenant Moss and explained that she was indeed there with Jimmy Faust. She claims she went out through the bedroom window when the shooting started. No one saw her in the confusion. Her name is Penny Bell. She was a *friend* of Jimmy Faust. Moss checked out her story, he was completely satisfied."

Bailey nodded, looked at Cranston. "Well, that seems to dispose of that. About what I would have expected, too. And as for being alone, Faust probably underestimated the mayor, and may even have been making some sort of play on his own, as Cranston more or less suggested."

Richards faced Cranston. "What do you think, Cranston?"

"It seems to take care of some of my doubts, Richards," Cranston said mildly. Behind his hooded eyes, though, The Shadow was thinking about the peculiar words of Vito Maggiore. There had been something bothering Maggiore, something the dead *Mafiosa* did not seem to understand. The Shadow wondered how well satisfied with the story of Penny Bell, the woman, Lieutenant Moss had been.

"Well, maybe I can help with some other doubts," Richards said. "I think the Mafia had the mayor and DA Hind on their list for a double killing. Something went

wrong, and Faust got killed instead of the mayor. After all, Faust may not have known that Mayor Rush was formerly Major Joe Rush of the OSS, and an experienced man with a gun."

"And DA Hind?" Cranston said. "Just where was he going that night?"

"There I can really help," Richards said. "Police records show that he got a telephone call only some ten or fifteen minutes before he was killed. Obviously a Mafia trap. I would even guess the call was to get Hind out to that motel to meet the same fate they planned for the mayor."

"Well," Cranston agreed, "that all makes sense. You think that, with Faust dead instead of Mayor Rush, they changed their MO and had to get Hind on the street?"

"It's a workable hypothesis," Richards said. "I don't jump to conclusions, but we have to start working somewhere."

Cranston agreed with that.

Chairman Bailey nodded vigorously. "Good, I think that's what we must all do—get started. I say, then, until we know more, we start by recommending more police."

Morgan Slater nodded vigorously. "Check. I can work with the chief and institute some better training methods."

"We also do a thorough investigation of the district attorney's office. There may be some clues to Hind's murder there, and I think the department could stand a long look. Will you take that on, Sam?"

"The defender to study the prosecutors? I'd be delighted," Samuel Bauermann said.

Bailey turned to Weston. "You and I, Ralph, can start planning an all out war on the Mafia. Not just here, but in the whole state, and let the governor howl!"

"We can plan," Weston agreed.

"Fine," Bailey said. "Then I think the first report of the commission should be to the effect that we give the police a vote of confidence, and more men, and that we think it is time for an all out effort against the Mafia."

The others all nodded agreement. They began to work out a text of their statement for the public. The secretaries

worked feverishly. Allen Richards excused himself to get on with his investigation work. Cranston, taking the lead from Richards, also excused himself. But Cranston had other reasons. It was time for The Shadow to check the reports of his agents.

4

SOME TIME before the crime commission came to its decision, the black car that had picked up the man in front of the courthouse, and driven slowly through the city, came to a stop in front of a tavern on the dark Santa Carla waterfront. The tavern was The Harbor Bar & Grill. It was a two story frame building out over the water, lighted by gaudy red and yellow neon signs. The area, a dock area, was dark all around it. Warehouses and shabby office buildings stood deserted at this night hour. The black car parked in plain sight, and the three men in it got out and went into The Harbor Bar & Grill. One of them was the man who had waited in front of the courthouse. The other two were younger and wore tight-fitting topcoats. The younger men walked warily, their eyes alert and watching all around them.

After the three men had entered the tavern, the bearded motorcyclist appeared on the dark street. He swung his cycle into an alley beside The Harbor Bar & Grill and dismounted. He left his cycle in the alley and walked slowly along the street in front of the tavern. The cyclist then entered the tavern, too. The street was deserted again. A drunk or two staggered hopefully along the dark sidewalk on the far side of the street from the harbor, afraid that too close to the water a sudden sway would send them into the drink. Once or twice a sober citizen hurried along looking neither right nor left in this dark neighborhood. Then, for a time, the street was entirely deserted.

Except for the mail truck parked half a block from The Harbor Bar & Grill.

Inside The Harbor Bar & Grill there were the usual scattered night customers, silent figures bent close above their drinks as if to protect the whisky, to prevent any small loss to the air by evaporation.

The interior of the tavern was quite dark. A long bar ran along the right wall as you came in, tables stood along the left wall. In the rear there were booths. At the end of the bar near the door there was a juke box. Before the tables began on the left wall there was a short coin-operated, shuffleboard bowling game. In addition to the silent patrons, there was a bartender in a white apron dirtier than the floor, and a shabby, cronelike scrubwoman who worked on the floor and continually had to look up and brush her straggly grey hair from her watery blue eyes.

The bearded motorcyclist leaned on the bar at the farthest end away from the door and near the booths. With his goggles off, he was revealed as a handsome young man despite the beard, or perhaps because of the beard. He drank a beer, lounged, and seemed to be very interested in the row of bottles that stood on the shelf behind the bar in front of the bar mirror. The booths were clearly visible in the mirror.

The dapper, grey-haired man who had watched the courthouse was seated in one of the booths. The two younger men were with him, seated in the same booth but both on the opposite side from the dapper older man. The older man sat all alone on his side of the booth. He had his back to the outside door. The two young men sat facing the door. They both watched the door carefully. They never drank at the same time. When one drank, the other sat with his hands resting lightly on the table of the booth. Both men had their coats unbuttoned. When the first one had had his drink, his hands rested on the table while the other drank. The dapper older man was studying some papers, he seemed to have no interest in the door or in his two young companions.

Some ten minutes after the three men from the black car had entered The Harbor Bar & Grill, the door opened

again and three more men came in. Two of these newcomers were stamped from the same mold that had made the two young men in the booth with the dapper older man—they wore tight topcoats, they had hard, wary eyes, and they had bulges in their pockets where some heavy object weighted the pockets down. These two guided the third man silently toward the booth where the dapper older man looked up now from his papers and turned to glance over his shoulder at the third man.

This third newcomer was nothing like the others. Gaudily dressed in a brown suit with a wide lighter stripe, a white shirt with a hand-painted tie, and two tone brown shoes, this third arrival was neither hard nor wary—he was terrified. A short, heavy-set, almost fat man with a two day growth of thick blue beard and a face that looked as if it had never been washed, the man darted his eyes about like a trapped animal. He stumbled twice on his way to the back booth where the dapper older man waited with a soft smile. The kind of smile a snake has when it sees its victim cornered at last. The third newcomer seemed almost paralyzed as he stumbled to the booth helped by silent urgings from the two men with him.

"Take a seat, Max," the dapper man said, indicating a space beside him on the booth bench.

"Sure, Mr. Turk, sure, anything you say," Max Goleta said, for that was who the terrified man was. He sat down.

The dapper man waved negligently at the four young men, said without looking at them, "Take a walk. Me and Mr. Goleta got some business. Watch the bar."

Max Goleta sat in the booth as if the seat were made of very thin eggs. Mr. Turk smiled benignly at the trembling motel owner. Goleta tried to get a grip on himself, and half succeeded. At least his hands stopped shaking, even if his blue-bearded jowls continued to vibrate. Mr. Turk waved to the barman to bring drinks.

"For me, a little wine, sonny. Max?"

"Whisky. Bourbon. Double," Goleta managed to get out one short word at a time.

"A little Wild Turkey for my friend Mr. Goleta, a double," Mr. Turk said to the bartender.

When the drinks arrived, Goleta downed half his hundred-and-one proof bourbon in a gulp. Mr. Turk sipped his red wine.

"So, Max, we talk a little?"

"Sure, Mr. Turk, like you say," Goleta stammered.

"You tell me about it? Tell me all about what happened to Jimmy Faust, okay?"

"Sure," Goleta said, and quickly, "only I don't know nothin'. I mean, like I called the cops. I didn't see Jim . . . Mr. Faust. I mean, I seen this dame, and then this guy I don't know he's the mayor, and I hear the shots, and I call the cops."

"Good, that's fine, Max. Now we take it from the top, everything. You tell me everything you remember. It don't matter if you figure it got some meaning or not, see? You just tell me all about it. Take it slow, we got lots of whisky."

The dapper man beamed at his trembling companion. Their voices fell low and, at the bar, no one could hear what happened after that. The handsome, bearded young man moved casually closer as far down the bar as he could get. But he came shoulder to shoulder with the four wary young men who stared at him. The bearded man pulled his leather jacket closer around him and concentrated on his beer. He swore and looked down once when the ancient crone of a scrubwoman moved at his feet. On her hands and knees, scrubbing, she splashed greasy grey water on the cyclist's polished boots, looked up with a gap-toothed grin like some cackling harpie. The bearded cyclist ignored her, but the four hard-eyed young men in the coats watched her carefully as she passed them. She grinned up, but she splashed no water on their shoes, and crawled on over the floor pushing her pail ahead of her.

Perhaps fifteen minutes passed before Mr. Turk nodded to his four young men. They ambled to the booth. Max Goleta watched them nervously. Mr. Turk had stopped smiling now, and his cold eyes seemed to fix Max Goleta to his seat in the booth.

"Okay, Max, you can go. Only don't go too far, okay? I might want to talk again," Mr. Turk said.

"Sure, Mr. Turk. I ain't going nowhere."

The motel owner sweated. Mr. Turk stared at him.

"Good. Maybe you try to remember more, okay?"

"Sure, I remember. I mean, I try good."

"You do that," Mr. Turk said, nodded to his young men. "See that Mr. Goleta reaches the door okay."

Two of the young men half lifted Max Goleta from his seat and escorted him to the outside door. One of them gave the motel owner's arm a small twist before he let him go. The young man smiled and pushed Goleta out the door.

On the dark street no one moved, and the mailman in his truck had seen nothing after Max Goleta entered The Harbor Bar & Grill. But Harry Vincent, Agent 3 of The Shadow, sat alert and watchful. He saw Max Goleta reappear on the street the instant the motel owner came through the door of The Harbor Bar & Grill. He saw the slight stumble as Goleta caught his balance after the push from Turk's man.

Goleta steadied and stood for a long moment there on the sidewalk in front of the tavern door. The motel owner seemed to take long, slow, deep breaths. Then his breathing became more normal. He shook himself as if to shake off clinging dirt. But it was only the dirt of fear. After he had shaken himself, he seemed to become a little taller, and he laughed once aloud. He straightened and then lighted a cigarette. He took another deep breath, smiled, and stepped across the sidewalk to the curb. He looked up and down the deserted street, and started briskly across the street as Harry Vincent watched from his mail truck.

Freed of the weight of fear inside The Harbor Bar & Grill, Max Goleta walked briskly now at an angle across the street toward the far corner. He did not see the car. Harry Vincent did. The disguised mailman saw the big car roar out of nowhere and bear down on the unaware Max Goleta. Vincent grabbed for his door handle and prepared to jump out. He leaned out and shouted. Max

Goleta heard the shout and saw the car at the same instant. The motel owner turned ghastly white, seemed for an instant paralyzed. Harry Vincent was out of his truck. The car bore straight down on Goleta. The motel owner moved, jumped, ran for the safety of the nearest building. He did not make it. As Goleta reached the far curb the black car reached him. Goleta was slammed up and forward against the building. The car careened up over the sidewalk, sideswiped the building, bounced back onto the street, and roared away into the night.

Max Goleta lay in a pool of blood.

The motel owner did not move.

The street was again silent, deserted. There was only the echo of the roaring car fading into the distance.

Harry Vincent ran toward the fallen motel owner.

As Vincent reached the motionless man, the street itself came to life. People came from the buildings. From The Harbor Bar & Grill the bartender was the first to appear. He turned and shouted back into the building. A small crowd had now emerged from all the dark doorways and buildings to stand around where Harry Vincent, still in his mailman's disguise, bent over the form of Max Goleta. The bearded cyclist in the leather jacket came out of The Harbor Bar & Grill and crossed the street to push through the crowd and look down at Max Goleta.

"How is he?" the cyclist asked.

"Dead," Harry Vincent said.

"Rough show," the bearded man said.

In front of The Harbor Bar & Grill, the dapper Mr. Turk stood on the sidewalk with his four young men. Turk motioned with his hand. One of the young men went to look at Max Goleta, turned and walked back to Turk. The young man spoke. Mr. Turk nodded. In the distance, now, the sirens of police cars came closer. Someone, probably the bartender, had reported to the police. The bearded cyclist went into the alley and got onto his motorcycle. He roared away into the dark night. Mr. Turk and his four satellites went back into The Harbor Bar & Grill. The crowd vanished like a mist in a wind—the police were not popular in this waterfront area. Harry Vincent returned to his mail truck.

By the time the police arrived there was nothing and no one left in sight on the dark street except the dead Max Goleta and the old scrubwoman standing alone in the doorway of The Harbor Bar & Grill. The police went to work. The scrubwoman went back inside the tavern. She still carried her buckets and brushes. She limped and shuffled across the floor, barely noticed, part of the scenery. But she did not return to work. Instead she shuffled into the back room of the tavern. There she put down her pail and equipment, looked carefully around her, and stepped into the mop closet. She closed the door behind her and a dull red glow seemed to fill the closet.

In the red glow the scrubwoman suddenly seemed to change. Her dull eyes brightened. Her bent shoulders squared. She stood taller, her movements no longer old and frail. Her hands no longer shook with age, but moved quickly and efficiently to take a tiny object from her pocket. The object was a small but thick-bottomed change purse. She pressed a clip and the bottom of the purse opened to reveal a tiny microphone. The rejuvenated scrubwoman passed the small ring on her right hand over the purse. It was the ring which gave the red glow. The scrubwoman raised the tiny microphone to her lips.

"Margo Lane reporting. Come in, Stanley. Margo reporting from The Harbor Bar & Grill."

"Report, Margo," a low, powerful voice said from the change purse.

It was the voice not of Stanley, but of The Shadow.

Lamont Cranston sat in the back of the Rolls-Royce parked behind the courthouse of Santa Carla. In the front seat Stanley kept careful watch. The chauffeur, bodyguard and agent of The Shadow wore a pair of infrared glasses and let his gaze slowly cover the entire area around the Rolls-Royce. Lamont Cranston appeared to be doing no more than talk into his private tape recorder. A businessman conducting his business away from his office. But the tape recorder was a microphone, and the voice was not that of Cranston but that of The Shadow.

"Report, Margo."

The voice of the efficient, dark-haired woman who was the First Agent of The Shadow spoke crisply from the distant closet of The Harbor Bar & Grill.

"Max Goleta has been killed. Run down by a car five minutes ago on the street in front of the tavern. The car escaped. The police are here now, I don't think they will learn much."

"Did anyone see who was in the car?"

"No. Harry Vincent observed the killing, but he gave me no sign that he had anything to report beyond the fact."

"Go on," Cranston said grimly in the voice of The Shadow.

"Before he was killed, Goleta had talked for some time to a man named Turk, Mr. Turk. This Turk is a thin, dapper man with grey hair. He is obviously a leader of some kind. He has four gunmen with him. They take orders."

"Yes, Margo, as I suspected. Marco Tucci, alias Mack Turk, alias The Turk. A Mafia leader I know only too well. He is not a local man. He must have come in after the death of Faust. That is why I had you infiltrate The Harbor Bar & Grill, it was known as a headquarters of Jimmy Faust. He, Turk, is also obviously the man who was watching the city jail. Waiting for Maggiore to commit suicide, of course. What did he and Goleta talk about?"

"The events of the night Faust was killed by the mayor. I could not hear most of it, but clearly Turk wants to know more about that night."

"So do I, Margo," Cranston said grimly. "Go on."

"The only other person of interest was a bearded young man who rides a motorcycle. He seemed more than interested in the conversation of Turk and Goleta, but I don't think he heard much. He went to the body after the hit and run, but he only asked if the man were dead. Then he drove off."

"I see," Cranston said. "I think we better try to find out just who and what this motorcyclist is. All right, Margo, I think I had better have a talk with Lieutenant Moss. The death of Goleta seems to indicate that there is much

more to know about the events at the motel that night. I blame myself, we moved too slowly."

"What shall I do, Chief?" Margo's voice asked.

"Remain at your post, keep a close watch on Turk and anyone he meets."

"Very good," Margo said, and her voice faded and was gone.

In the back of the Rolls-Royce Lamont Cranston sat for a time. Max Goleta was dead—for some reason silenced, killed. Why? By whom? The Mafia? Yes, it was possible, he could have been set up by Turk. On the other hand, Turk had asked questions, and it did not seem that there would have been time to set up a killing once he had his answers. Still, perhaps the questioning was only a ruse, Turk intending only to kill Goleta all along. He blamed himself for moving too slowly. But perhaps it was not too late. Lieutenant Moss had not been entirely satisfied by the events at the El Capitan Motel. It was probable that Moss had interrogated Goleta. If so, Cranston wanted to know what Moss knew. He leaned forward in the rear seat.

"Police Headquarters, Stanley."

The Rolls-Royce moved swiftly and almost silently out of the parking lot toward the nearby Police Headquarters. In the back seat Lamont Cranston prepared for his meeting with Moss. Only, moments later, it was not Lamont Cranston who sat in the back seat of the Rolls-Royce—it was The Shadow.

The Rolls-Royce stopped at an alley that ran behind Police Headquarters of Santa Carla. The Shadow glided out and away into the night—a shadow blending into the shadows of the city.

5

THE CORRIDORS of the police headquarters of Santa Carla are wide and floored with marble. There is light, but in

the hours of the night the lights are low for the sake of civic economy, and there are shadows that gather in the darker spaces between the office doors. The police never sleep, but late at night there are fewer of them, they slow down, and the corridors are traveled only lightly.

There were few to see that the shadows along some of the corridors appeared to move, did move. Had there been any to see, and had they looked closely enough, they would have seen not shadows that moved, but The Shadow gliding in silence along the deserted corridors. The cloaked Avenger floated like some great black bird past the dimly lighted offices.

The cloaked Avenger paused for a long minute outside the frosted glass door that bore the legend: *Lieutenant Joseph Moss, Homicide*. Silently he opened the door and slipped like a wraith into the room. It was a small room, a one room office with a single window and rows of filing cabinets. There was a desk and two wooden chairs and a long wooden bench with a slatted back. There was a single small desk lamp that cast the most feeble of circles of light onto the desk and barely reached the corners of the room. On the desk there were mounds of manilla folders, papers, official documents. All this The Shadow saw in a split second, his photographic memory storing it all in the instant of seeing.

The Shadow also saw the man lying on the floor behind the desk—and the slim woman bending over the fallen man.

His piercing eyes flashed as he watched.

The woman, her search of the fallen man completed, stood up. She stared down, her back still turned to The Shadow. For a moment, there was something familiar about her slim back. Then she laughed. A hard, cruel laugh as chilling as the laugh of The Shadow himself.

"So, my silent friend, now you know. Honesty never pays!"

The woman laughed again, loud and hard like the laugh of some jungle animal.

The Shadow glided forward.

Her laugh had scarcely faded to a whispering echo

when another laugh filled the room. The eerie laughter of The Shadow.

The woman stiffened for a second.

Then she turned, whirled.

She saw the towering black shape before her, the burning eyes fixed on her, the sharp hawk nose that made the figure before her look like some great black bird of prey. She saw the glow of the fire-opal girasol on the finger that pointed to her like the stabbing finger of an accusing angel.

In the brief moment that they faced each other The Shadow saw that the woman was little more than a girl. Perhaps twenty, no more. Tall, slender, magnificently curved in the tight green dress. Long dark hair, a perfect nose, full lips and a face that would have done credit to any contest of female beauty. A face that could only be termed beautiful, and yet. . . . The lips, at the corners, had a curve of cruelty. The body was coiled and tense like some wily and dangerous predator. Catlike, and with all the hidden muscles of the cat. And the eyes! Her eyes were cold, flat, hard and very quick—burning eyes that bore a faint resemblance to the eyes of The Shadow himself. Powerful eyes.

The black-garbed Avenger saw all this in the split second that she faced him. She whirled, looked at him for the instant, and then something leaped from the sleeve of her green dress, literally leaped out of the sleeve into her hand. Something pointed at The Shadow.

There was no time even for The Shadow to reach her. But in the flash of time in which he saw the object pointed up, he realized two things: the woman had *heard* him, had heard him an instant before he laughed, or she could not have acted so swiftly; and the woman could *see* him now, clearly, completely, despite the dimness of the office and the black garb that blended with the dark of the room.

That was all he had time to think.

The object in her hand spat once, a puff as a puff of wind, and a cloud of gas streamed out toward the cloaked Avenger.

There was no time to reach her before she fired. Even

The Shadow was not proof against poison gas, if it were poison. But for The Shadow there was time to escape. For no one else on earth, perhaps, but for The Shadow there was time. With a surge of his trained muscles, The Shadow hurled himself backward faster than the stream of gas could move toward him.

Even as he escaped, his powers were working. Beyond the cloud of gas for a matter of seconds, the black-garbed enemy of evil concentrated his mind and his will and his trained muscles. He forced his lungs into the technique of shallow breathing learned long ago in the Orient. The technique allowed a man to be buried alive, to breath hours, even days, longer than a normal man in a space of air no bigger than a coffin. Now, his breathing slowed to almost nothing, The Shadow moved forward again through the cloud of gas that was slowly dissipating in the silent air of the dim office.

But he had been stopped for a matter of ten to fifteen seconds. It was enough for the woman. As The Shadow glided swiftly forward through the dissipating cloud of gas he saw that the woman was gone. The single window was open. There was no other way from the room except the door The Shadow had been standing in front of. The cloaked crime-fighter floated through the small office to the window. His burning eyes looked down into the alley that opened beneath the window. He saw the alley clear as day in the dark night.

The alley was two stories below.

It was empty.

The vision of The Shadow saw marks on the stone below—and a small piece of green cloth snagged on a protruding iron bracket against the wall. The woman had leaped into the alley.

Two floors below!

His fiery eyes blazing, The Shadow leaped after her.

A policeman, smoking at the rear door of the first floor below, blinked as he saw, or thought he saw, the great black shape seem to fly down out of the night, land, and vanish as swiftly as the wind toward the entrance to the alley. Later, the policeman knew it had been only a figment of his imagination, but he did not sleep for many

days, the great black shape floating through his mind.

At the entrance to the alley, The Shadow floated out into the street. It was a long street. There was little light —and the street was both silent and empty. Then, suddenly, the sound of a motorcycle motor filled the dark. The Shadow raced toward the sound that came from the far end of the street. Hidden by the darkness, the black-garbed master crimefighter moved in silence. Near the corner of the first cross street a figure in tight jeans and boots and a black leather jacket bent over the motorcycle. Then the figure straightened up to climb on the cycle, and turned toward The Shadow. The face The Shadow saw was neither the face of the woman, nor the face of the bearded cyclist reported by both Margo and Harry Vincent. The face that was turned to The Shadow, but that did not see the dark shape of the Avenger, was heavier than the face of the woman, square, with a thick nose and the wrinkles of forty or more years. Makeup could not fool The Shadow, and there had not been time. The wrinkles and the nose of the cyclist's face were real, and the thick, barrel chest was real.

The man stood facing the unseen shape of The Shadow for a full minute, listening to the sound of his engine. Then, satisfied, he climbed aboard the cycle and roared away. The Shadow stared after the cyclist. He would remember the face, and the license number of the motorcycle. There were now two motorcyclists who wore boots and black leather jackets. But now The Shadow had a matter of greater urgency on his mind. He whirled and glided silently back to the alley. He moved to the wall beneath the window of the office of Lieutenant Moss. Using the steel-like strength of his fingers, and the special suction cups he had designed himself, the Avenger swarmed up the sheer wall like a great bat and vanished through the open window.

Inside the office again, The Shadow paused to listen. There was no sound. Nothing had been heard beyond the office. The Avenger moved to the fallen man and bent down. The man was dead. He was a tallish man, about thirty-five, already going grey. The long fingers of The Shadow searched and found the man's wallet. The dead

man was Lieutenant Moss. The burning eyes of The Shadow studied the corpse. There were no marks of any kind. Bending closer, the Avenger saw that the lips were faintly blue, the face slightly contorted. The Shadow stood up and stared down at the dead policeman. He had seen a body like this before. In Sea Gate, New Jersey, when the killer Pavlic had been murdered with a gas gun! The Shadow was sure that to anyone else the death of Moss would look like a heart attack. Moss had been killed by the same weapon the woman had used to try to kill The Shadow—an assassin's weapon!

Bending again, The Shadow resumed his search of the dead lieutenant. He found nothing unusual until he came upon a scrap of paper. He opened it and found it to be a note without either signature or salutation. It read simply: *How? Truck? Still there? Motorcycle? Check on this.* The Shadow studied the note. It was jotted in pencil on an ordinary piece of notebook paper. A memo, a reminder of some kind, undoubtedly written by Moss himself to remind him of something he wanted to remember to do. The Shadow considered the note, then carefully placed it inside the folds of his black cloak. Whatever Moss had wanted to check on would now be checked by The Shadow.

The great black figure turned his attention to the office itself. He was certain that the woman who had killed Lieutenant Moss had not had time to search the office—the note alone was proof of that. Whatever the note meant, it probably related to a case Moss had been working on, and there was no question but that Moss had been killed to prevent his continuing some investigation. The question was—which investigation? The Shadow was more than suspicious that it was the killings of Faust and Drake Hind. His suspicions were almost certainly confirmed when he searched the files in the silent office and found that neither the Faust file nor the file on Drake Hind were in their places. He returned to the desk and found them there in plain sight—he had surprised the killer just in time!

The Drake Hind file contained nothing but the details of the killing, which The Shadow knew, and the confir-

mation of the fact that Allen Richards had told Cranston —Hind had indeed had a telephone call just before he left his house to meet, in the end, his death. There was also a record for Vito Maggiore, proving that the dead prisoner had been a Mafia member. But attached to this record was a small piece of paper of the same type as the note The Shadow had found in Moss's pocket. On this paper there were no words, nothing but a large, scrawled question mark (?)! The Shadow nodded grimly to himself in the dim office. His eyes burned as he stared at the note and the question mark. Yes, Moss had had questions about Maggiore, and so did The Shadow.

He turned to the file on Jimmy Faust, the dead Mafia leader who had contacted Mayor Rush. This file was much thicker. Most of it was no more than the long criminal record of the late Faust, something as well known to The Shadow as to the police. But included in the Faust file was a report on Penny Bell—the woman who had been with Faust the night of his death at the El Capitan Motel. The Shadow bent closely over the file, his eyes studying every detail of the report, filing every detail in his photographic memory.

There was a copy of the Bell woman's police record—a short file, all minor arrests, primarily for acting as a bar girl, a comeon to lure men into clip joints. The last arrest was less than four weeks ago. Her personal dossier was complete. Full name: Penelope Bell. Age: 24; height; 5 ft. 5 in.; weight: 112 pounds. Her address was 407 South Perdido Street, and she was married: husband listed as Henry (Hank) Bell, same address. There was, finally, a picture of the Bell girl.

The Shadow scrutinized the picture. It showed a thin, but quite well-curved girl, with a small, round face that was pretty as a kewpie doll is pretty. A round, pretty but characterless, doll-like face. Yet, there was something! The eyes of the black-shrouded Avenger studied the picture as if under a microscope. There was something very vaguely familiar about Penny Bell—again! Like the woman who had killed Moss, the tall, cold-eyed beauty in green. Both women totally unalike, and yet both somehow familiar to the keen eyes and photographic mind of

The Shadow. He focused his mind, searched inside his brain for the key—and heard the faint noise!

So swiftly no one could see, he slid the picture of Penny Bell from the file and into the folds of his great cloak. Then he turned.

A uniformed policeman stood transfixed in the doorway.

The great black shape of The Shadow loomed above the desk and the body of Lieutenant Moss. His burning eyes stabbed his power toward the patrolman.

But there was no time for the power to work and cloud the mind of the amazed officer.

By the reflex action of his training, the policeman began to shout and claw for his revolver.

Doors opened along the corridor outside. Feet were already running toward the office where Moss lay dead. The policeman had his revolver half out. The Shadow leaped forward. His powerful hand darted out and felled the struggling policeman with a single blow to the side of the neck—a half-blow, to stun and not kill. The policeman dropped like a stone, his revolver clattering to the floor, skidding across the room.

The pounding feet and the excited voices were close to the door into the room now. The Shadow whirled, laughed his chilling laugh once, and leaped out through the window. Behind him there was pandemonium in the office of the dead Moss, the echo of his laugh dying away behind him as he plunged down into the alley again like the great bird of prey. In the alley he turned and glided toward the open end.

The door into the alley from the first floor burst open and uniformed policemen poured out into the alley.

"There!" one policeman shouted. "There it is!"

"Good God, what is it?"

A voice shouted from above. "Moss is dead! Get him!"

The police poured through the alley. The Shadow, his great black cloak billowing in the night, raced silently along the alley and out into the street. He ran with his amazing speed along the dark street, a giant black wraith in the night with his cloak floating and whipping out behind, his feet making almost no sound as he ran. His

mocking laugh drifted back to the outdistanced police. But they did not give up and pursued him along the silent streets of the city. As he ran, The Shadow concentrated his burning glance onto his fire-opal girasol ring. The ring began to glow. Moments later, as the black Avenger glided around a corner far ahead of his pursuit, the Rolls-Royce appeared on the street. The Shadow leaped into the car which almost silently drove away. When the police came around the corner they saw nothing but an empty, silent street. The Shadow had vanished. The police stood and stared for some time, looked at each other.

In the rear seat of the Rolls-Royce The Shadow passed the glowing girasol over his tape recorder microphone. In the front seat Stanley drove and waited for instructions. The Shadow bent close to the microphone the instant it began to hum with the signal that Burbank, in the hidden room far away in New York, was seated before his console ready to report.

"Report," The Shadow said sharply.

Burbank's distant voice was cool, neutral. "Report no contact with Agents Lane or Vincent."

The Shadow sat rigid, alert in the back seat of the smooth-gliding Rolls-Royce. "How long?"

"Neither agent One nor Three made their midnight checkin," Burbank said coolly, his voice betraying no emotion, no personal feelings. That was his job, the contact, the central control of the far-flung secret organization of The Shadow.

"Margo contacted Cranston just before midnight," The Shadow said.

"Yes, the monitor tape recorded the contact. After that there has been no word. According to standard procedure, no voice attempt has been made to contact said agents. Visual signal was transmitted, but resulted in no contact."

In the dark rear seat of the Rolls-Royce, The Shadow's fiery eyes glowed. Each agent made checks with Control Central at 0800 hours, 1600 hours, and 2400 hours when on full assignment. If the agent failed to make his con-

tact, voice contact was not attempted for fear of betraying the agent. Visual signal was transmitted causing the replicas of The Shadow's fire-opal girasol worn by all agents to glow dully. If two checkins were missed, voice contact was attempted. Now The Shadow had to decide what action to take. The last contact with Margo had been from The Harbor Bar & Grill.

"Very well, Burbank, remain at post until further contact." The Shadow moved his ring again and the radio became silent. He leaned forward. "The Harbor Bar and Grill, Stanley, and drive fast."

Minutes later the Rolls-Royce slowed and stopped one dark block from The Harbor Bar & Grill. The waterfront tavern was dark and silent. Nothing moved on the water of the harbor. Far out at the mouth of the harbor a small lighthouse at the end of the breakwater circled its solitary light. On the water itself silent bellbuoys flashed their lonely signals. Stanley turned to face his chief. But the man now in the back seat was not The Shadow, it was Lamont Cranston.

"Any orders, Chief?" Stanley said.

"Yes, the tavern seems closed, Stanley. Leave the car, we will both see what we can find."

"What are we looking for, boss?"

"Margo did not report in, Stanley. We are looking for what happened to her."

"She can take care of herself, Boss."

Cranston was grim. "Let us hope so, Stanley."

The two men left the car and walked quietly but quickly to the door of the dark and silent tavern.

6

INSIDE The Harbor Bar & Grill the chairs were piled on the tables, a single bare bulb lighted the entire interior. A long cloth covered the rows of bottles behind the bar.

Another cloth had been draped over the beer taps. The rows of glasses shined dully in the feeble night.

Cranston and Stanley appeared inside the outer door as if by magic. Stanley held a large, ugly automatic in his hand, and the magic was explained by the tiny but special pick lock that Cranston now returned to his secret inner pocket. The two men moved through the room in the eerie glow of the bare bulb. They made no sound. It was quickly clear that there was nothing to be found in the barroom itself. Cranston and Stanley made a careful search, but there was little space to be searched. They found nothing connected in any way with Margo, and turned their attention to the rear doors. Stanley searched the two rest rooms. Cranston entered the kitchen and back storeroom. Neither man found anything until Cranston opened the door of the broom and mop closet. There he found Margo's pail—and the reason for her silence.

On the floor, in a corner not far from the pail but hidden from any eyes less keen than those of The Shadow, he saw the change purse that contained, hidden in the bottom, Margo's special radio. He picked it up.

"Her radio," Stanley said. "Boss, that . . ."

"That, Stanley, may be good, not bad. Margo had time to leave the radio as a clue for us, and to prevent anyone from discovering it. It means, I think, that she has been captured by someone, but only captured. She was probably caught just after she made the call to me."

"If they know who . . ." Stanley began.

"If they knew who she was, Stanley, she would probably have been killed. No, I think they caught her in suspicious circumstances, and are super careful. They have probably taken her somewhere to try to find out who she is."

"Then as long as they don't know, she's safe?"

"I think that's it. Now it is up to us to find her before they force her to tell!" Cranston said.

While he had been talking, Cranston had been studying the kitchen. His keen eyes told him that something was odd there. Now, as Stanley watched, Cranston began to walk around the walls. The kitchen seemed normal enough to Stanley. There were a bank of stoves, one the

wide-doored pizza type, the usual sinks, and rows of tall shelves that reached to the ceiling and were loaded with food supplies. It was at one of the shelf sections that Cranston looked closely.

"Do you see anything, Stanley?" Cranston asked.

"No, boss. It looks like an ordinary shelf section, just like the others."

"An ordinary shelf section, Stanley," Cranston said, "but not just like the others. It is a hair farther out into the kitchen."

Stanley stared at the section. He could still see nothing. But he had worked with his chief too long to doubt that what Cranston said was true. No other eyes in the world could have seen that the shelf section was the smallest fraction of a millimeter farther out from the wall. But the eyes of The Shadow could see the infinitesimal difference. Now Cranston began to study the entire shelf section. Stanley inspected the other edge of the shelves.

"Here!" Cranston said sharply.

The wealthy socialite pointed to a single small bolt head at the edge of one of the shelves in the section. The shelves were all metal and were held together by nuts and bolts. This particular bolt looked exactly like all the others to Stanley, but not to Cranston.

"It's a shade larger, Stanley. To contain an electrical contact. The section is a hair farther out because there has to be some mechanism. This shelf section has to be a door of some kind," Cranston explained.

He pressed the bolt. There was a momentary pause, and then a faint whirring sound. The section of shelving began to swing out, until it was at a forty-five degree angle to the wall. Cranston and Stanley walked behind it and found themselves in a large, well-appointed office.

There were two large wooden desks of the most expensive type. There were easy chairs in leather, two long and elegant couches, a large home bar with small refrigerator—both well-stocked—and, through an archway, what seemed to be a telephone and radio communication room. In the main room there were also rows of elegant maple filing cabinets, and four obviously original and expensive paintings on the walls. The floor was covered

wall to wall by a thick, expensive carpeting. Stanley looked at Cranston.

"It's quite a place, Boss. What do you think it means?"

Cranston let his impassive gaze take in the room. "I would say, Stanley, that we have found the private office of the late Jimmy Faust. In other words, Mafia headquarters in Santa Carla!"

"The other desk, boss?"

Cranston smiled. "The old Black Hand has come a long way from their days of extortion from poor Sicilians. They do things properly now, even elegantly. I would guess that the second desk is for the use of visiting chiefs, such as our friend Mr. Turk."

"It's quite a layout," Stanley agreed.

Cranston nodded thoughtfully. "Perhaps they discovered Margo snooping in the kitchen, and that is why they took her. I expect this office is a well-kept secret."

"Those files should really hold some information," Stanley said.

"Yes, for the police. But I think that the kind of information we need will not be in the files. You can take the Mafia out of petty criminal activities, Stanley, but you can't take the petty criminal mind out of the Mafia. No, Stanley, I think that anything vital and very dangerous will be hidden. That is the way the Mafia thinks—no matter what business they may get into, still they are psychologically criminals."

Again the keen eyes of Cranston studied the room. He was particularly interested in the four paintings. He smiled. No, they had not been that obvious this time. There was nothing behind the four paintings. He reached into his pocket and took out a tiny metallic instrument with a miniature gauge on it. He began to move the instrument along the walls and over the furniture and objects in the hidden office. For a time nothing happened and he continued to move the instrument above everything in the room. When he reached the large home bar the instrument reacted. The gauge moved sharply to the right. Cranston smiled and studied the bar. Stanley had watched the entire operation with a certain puzzlement. Cranston looked at his chauffeur and bodyguard.

"It is a meter I just developed in my laboratory, Stanley. It measures perspiration residue. You see, when a man touches something he leaves traces of sweat, in the sweat there are specific body oils. I set the gauge to show no reaction from the normal level of residue on anything around an office that is touched under normal conditions. This means that when the gauge does react it will show something touched very often, as a regular matter—such as a safe combination lock!"

Stanley admired his boss. "That's pretty good."

"Well," Cranston said drily. "It is an aid, but you have to be careful how you use it. It will show a fountain pen, of course, and it would be useless in, say, a locker room. But here I think we can trust it."

Suiting action to words, Cranston bent down and examined the home bar. He frowned, there seemed to be nothing unusual about the bar itself. He stood and pushed the bar. It moved. Cranston pushed harder and the bar swung out on a pivot to reveal a large metal door set into the floor beneath the bar. On the door there was a heavy combination lock. It was clearly a safe.

"I think we will find something of interest in here."

Stanley bent to inspect the safe. The chauffeur-bodyguard was an expert on safes and locks.

"A good box, Boss. Set in concrete, about two feet thick on all sides, probably below, too," Stanley said. "I never saw one just like this. It's custom made, a real hard box to crack."

Cranston said nothing. The wealthy socialite squatted down above the box and went to work. His long, facile, ultra-sensitive fingers began to manipulate the combination dial. His hooded eyes were as impassive as ever, but behind the mild facade the ears of The Shadow listened to the telltale sounds of the mechanism. His mind locked out all other sound. He swept his mind clear by an effort of will. In seconds his long fingers had opened the safe. He reached in and removed the contents and laid them on the thick rug.

There was seventy-five thousand dollars in cash in large bills. There was a checkbook with entries in some complicated number code. There were two pistols care-

fully wrapped, separately. They were both old pistols. Stanley touched the cloth that covered the pistols.

"Why old guns, boss?"

Cranston was grim. "Remember that the basis of Mafia power has always been extortion. I would guess that these guns were used in some murders, and are carefully preserved for the power they have over whoever used them. You'll note how carefully wrapped they are? Undoubtedly to preserve fingerprints."

"The police can use all of this," Stanley said.

"Yes, I'm turning it over to you to have sent to the proper authorities in Washington. Meanwhile, I think this is what we want."

Cranston held a small, black leather notebook. The socialite opened the book. It contained two sections of telephone numbers. The first section had only a few numbers, perhaps twenty, all out of town. Cranston thumbed slowly through this first section of numbers reading each one thoughtfully. At last he pointed to one number.

"It is a New York number, certainly," Cranston said, "and the initials beside it are VG. You'll note that the number has been crossed out! That must be Victor Gionno, Don Victor, the top man. He's crossed out because he happens to be residing in Leavenworth at the moment. Which means, Stanley, that these numbers must be the listings of all top Mafia men in the country. I see a number that is in the Kansas City area that has the initials, MT. That would be our friend Marco Tucci, alias The Turk."

Stanley was excited. "Then with that book the cops can break it all up! Catch them all!"

Cranston shook his head. "I'm afraid it's not that simple, Stanley. I expect that every name in this book is well known to the police, and well known as Mafia leaders. Most of them are known, it is proving it that is so difficult. What keeps the Mafia operating is care to never leave proof of their worst crimes—and the indifference and venality of 'good' citizens with the power to stop them. The ability to stop them is there, Stanley, it is the will that is missing. Too many 'good' people profit from them, or simply don't care enough."

"But that's stupid, Boss!"

"I have, sadly, never noted that we lack in stupidity in this world, Stanley," Cranston said. "If people were not so stupid, there would be no need for The Shadow. There would be no work for The Shadow if people acted always wisely."

There was a silence as Stanley nodded. Then Cranston bent to the small black notebook again. He had turned to the second section. Now he leaned forward, his hooded eyes glowing for a moment with the fire of The Shadow.

"Here is something else, Stanley," Cranston said. He pointed to the second section of numbers—a much longer section. "These are all local numbers, Stanley! At least all in the state if not in Santa Carla itself!"

"The payoff list!"

Cranston's eyes, behind the passive facade, were hard as he read the list of telephone numbers and initials. "Probably, Stanley, but also numbers Faust wanted to keep handy for regular calling. Look, here is the number with the initials MG, and I'm sure that it is the number of the El Capitan Motel."

"Max Goleta!"

"Yes. Which means that Faust and Goleta must have known each other at least by sight. Yet Goleta did not know that Faust was even in that cabin!"

"Well, I don't expect Faust was advertising it if he planned to kill Mayor Rush," Stanley pointed out.

"No, Stanley, that's possible. Faust may have remained purposely unseen. But there is only one door to that motel cabin, and Goleta saw both the Bell woman and Mayor Rush! It would seem logical that, having seen the mayor, he would watch that cabin pretty closely—for blackmail possibilities if for nothing else."

Stanley nodded again, and Cranston went on reading the numbers. He pointed significantly at two numbers that were in the state capital.

"Bailey hinted that the governor might actually have some Mafia connections. That number is in the Capitol district."

But it was the next number that he stopped at that

made Cranston blink his eyes slowly. The number had the initials DH, and was a local Santa Carla number.

"Drake Hind," Cranston said.

"Then Faust did call Hind," Stanley said.

Cranston rubbed his chin. "Perhaps, Stanley. Someone called Drake Hind to his death, and the number is here in the book. But, somehow, I find it hard to believe that a Mafia plot could backfire so completely on its leader. The facts all point to it, true, but there is something more certain than even facts."

"More certain, Boss?"

"Patterns, Stanley, probability. The pattern is not right. The probability is not right. Somewhere, Stanley, there is a key we are missing in this case."

But before Cranston could continue, there was a faint, low sound that seemed to come from somewhere inside the wealthy socialite's clothes. A soft, almost unhearable hiss. A hiss that undulated, whispered. Cranston reached into some hidden pocket within his coat and brought out the fire-opal girasol. It was glowing deep red in the silent office of the Mafia. Cranston returned his ring to its secret pocket after passing it over the heavy signet ring he wore in its place when he was Lamont Cranston. Instantly a voice spoke quietly from the signet ring.

"Burbank reporting."

"Report," Cranston snapped.

"Contact made with Agent 3, Harry Vincent. Vincent reports the capture of Margo Lane by a man named Mr. Turk. Miss Lane taken to a lakeside lodge five miles outside Santa Carla. The lodge is named Lakeview Inn. Agent Vincent followed, could not pause to make his regular call in or emergency contact. He is now keeping the lodge under close surveillance."

"Is that all?" Cranston said quietly.

"End of report."

Cranston again passed the girasol over the signet ring and the glow went out of the girasol, the signet ring was silent. The impassive face of the socialite showed no emotion. He turned to Stanley.

"You have your maps?"

"Yes, Boss."

"Return all the materials to that safe. We can't alert them to what we know yet."

The materials returned, Cranston and Stanley left the hidden office, closed the secret door behind them, and walked rapidly out of the kitchen through the silent tavern with its single ghostly light, and out the door into the street.

In the powerful Rolls-Royce, they drove out of the city.

7

ON A LONELY dirt road that skirted the edge of a large lake, a mail truck was parked and hidden just off the road in the thick underbrush. The truck, where it was parked, had a clear view of the road, and of a large wooden two storey building that was built directly beside the lake itself. A porch ran all around the wooden building, and a large sign proclaimed Lakeview Inn. The inn was dark except for two windows lighted in the front downstairs. It was these windows, and the road from the lodge, that the man in the mail truck watched steadily.

From time to time shadows passed behind the lighted windows. The shadows waved their arms, apparently in some kind of argument. On the lake a small pleasure boat passed occasionally. On the road itself nothing moved. Twice a young, swarthy man in a dark coat came out to the long black car parked in front of Lakeview Inn. Every now and then one of the men inside came out to stand in the cool night air and smoke a cigarette. All the men but the young man who still wore his topcoat came out in their shirtsleeves, sweat stains under the arms as if they had been working hard, the straps of their shoulder holsters clear under the porch light of the Lakeside Inn. The man in the mail truck never took his eyes from the inn, except to check every few minutes on the road.

Alert as he was, he failed to hear the movement behind

him until two men stepped from the night beside the truck. The man whirled in his seat, raised the heavy .45 automatic he had been holding hidden in his lap. Then he saw the two men, and lowered his pistol. He smiled to the new arrivals.

"Hello, Chief," Harry Vincent said.

"Are they still in there, Harry?" Cranston asked.

"Yeah," Harry Vincent said.

"How many of them, Mr. Vincent?" Stanley asked.

"At least five, probably a couple more. I'm pretty sure there were some already in the lodge when Turk and his boys brought Margo in."

"Any women?" Cranston asked. "A young woman, very beautiful, in a green dress?"

Vincent shook his head. "Not that I saw, Chief. Maybe there was a woman already there when they arrived, but if there is then she hasn't showed. The shadows on the window shades all look like men."

Cranston nodded thoughtfully. The beautiful, cold woman who had killed Lieutenant Moss was becoming more and more important in his mind. She was the odd fact, the fact that did not fit. She and the two black-jacketed motorcyclists, although they could be Mafia. Even though one had followed Turk, as had been suggested in the commission room, it was possible that there was some sort of intra-Mafia war going on.

"How did Margo seem?" Cranston asked.

"She seemed good," Harry Vincent said. "Only they broke her disguise, Chief."

"They know who she is!" Cranston snapped.

Harry Vincent shook his head. "I don't know about that for sure, Chief, but she was out of the scrubwoman disguise. She was herself."

Cranston said no more for the moment. He was now watching the inn while Harry explained all that had happened since he, Harry, had left the courthouse area that night. Cranston knew the general pattern, but Harry now filled him in on the details. Cranston listened carefully, nodding from time to time. Stanley had gone back up the road some distance to guard against any surprise from the

direction away from the inn. Cranston was rubbing his heavy chin when Harry finished his report.

"Turk remained until the commotion? He seemed pleased when he saw all the activity in the jail?" Cranston said.

"Yes, Chief. He looked like he'd seen what he'd been waiting for."

"I expect he had—the suicide of Vito Maggiore. I heard Maggiore talking about a 'kiss.' He was afraid. The Kiss of Death. Somehow Turk had given him the kiss, an act that means either murder or suicide depending on the circumstances. Turk had instructed Maggiore to kill himself if he could not hold out. I should have known, not pushed so hard."

"That must be it, Chief. Turk was very pleased when he walked off," Harry Vincent said. "Then Maggiore was involved in killing Drake Hind?"

"Perhaps, but not necessarily. Turk could simply have been afraid Maggiore would reveal other secrets. There is still something more than peculiar about exactly what Maggiore was doing at the scene of Hind's murder. And what about those men in the black leather jackets?"

"I don't know, Chief. I only saw that one, the bearded one. I'm pretty sure he had been either watching the jail too, or watching Turk. He was inside the tavern when Goleta was there. Margo would know more about what happened inside."

"Then I think we better talk to Margo," Cranston said. "I think this is a job for The Shadow, eh?"

Cranston's eyes flashed once with the fire of The Shadow. He laughed his mocking laugh very softly. He was about to vanish to become The Shadow when there was a low whistle from back up the dark side road. Stanley whistling a warning. Someone was coming along the road. Cranston and Harry Vincent slipped into the bushes that bordered the road and listened. The motor was loud but not powerful. Then a single headlight stabbed the night and almost instantly went out. Rapidly the intruder approached where Cranston and Harry Vincent were crouched.

A motorcyclist wearing boots, goggles and a black leather jacket.

A smooth-faced cyclist riding his cycle without light now, a swift shape in the night like some black ghost, small and quickly passing. The cyclist seemed to glance once toward the Lakeview Inn, and then was gone up the road into the darkness.

"They're all over the place!" Harry Vincent said. "One of those kid motorcycle clubs, probably."

"Alone? Always near when something is happening?" Cranston said. "No, Harry, I think not. They fit into this somewhere."

There was a light step in the bushes and Stanley now joined Cranston and Harry Vincent. The chauffeur looked down the dark road to where the motorcyclist had vanished.

"Did he see you?"

"No," Cranston said.

"Was he the same one, Chief?"

"Yes, I think so. The one who was there when the woman escaped me. I'm begining to think these motorcyclists have something to do with that woman."

"What about Margo, Chief?" Stanley said.

"Yes, it is time we rescue her. Harry says there are at least five men in there. Stanley, I want you to stay in front, watch from there, and be ready with your automatic. Harry, you take the rear and back me up. I anticipate very little trouble from them, but I have to move carefully so as not to endanger Margo. They are not the type to kill her for no reason, but The Shadow will probably scare them, and a scared gunman is more dangerous than a hired killer. When they're scared you can never be sure just what they'll do."

"We take them, boss?" Stanley asked.

Cranston nodded. "Yes, I think it is time we took them. It is time The Shadow learned exactly what is going on in Santa Carla. These people have been acting very strangely for Mafia men engaged in a war with the police."

"You want them alive?" Harry Vincent asked.

"As many as possible," Cranston said grimly. "I par-

ticularly want Turk alive, and that woman in green if she is in there."

"Those gunmen will fight," Stanley said.

"Not if I can get to them in time, Stanley," Cranston said. "Not if The Shadow reaches them before they are aware he is near them. There should be little trouble. Check your weapons, and prepare to . . ."

Cranston stopped speaking. His head came alert, his hooded eyes flashing the fire of The Shadow for an instant. His delicate hearing had heard a sound. Stanley and Harry Vincent watched their leader. Cranston listened. Then he motioned, silently, for Stanley to move to the right toward the road, and for Harry Vincent to move to the left around the thick bushes. The noise was far too small and soft and distant for Stanley or Harry Vincent to hear. But they knew their chief, the powers of The Shadow, and they moved into their actions without a word.

The noise Cranston had heard was the faint sound of someone moving through the bushes toward them from the opposite direction, from behind them. The stealthy movement was distant, but coming closer. Stanley and Harry Vincent knew their work, they would allow the unseen intruder to pass through them toward Cranston, and then close in behind him in the classical double envelopment tactic on a miniature scale. Cranston himself would be the main force waiting in the path of the approaching stranger.

The socialite listened and heard every detail of the unseen advance. Whoever it was also knew his work well. No one but The Shadow could have heard the faint sounds of his approach. He, if the unseen stranger was a he, moved expertly, making his approach with exactly the right amount of caution and speed. Cranston's keen ears detected many details. The man was not a big man, was probably quite slender from the way he barely brushed the bushes. The man carried a weapon in his right hand, the tiny heavier tread of the right foot indicated that the man was bent slightly to the right in the classic position for a person moving warily through the night with his weapon ready in front of him, bent in a half crouch. The

person also carried something on his back, something quite small but heavy enough to bounce faintly, move—something over his shoulder on a strap, against his back.

Cranston saw the bushes move long before the person appeared. Then the bushes parted and the man appeared. From where he lay flat and watching, Cranston saw the man. He was a small, compact, but slender man wearing a simple business suit. He carried a pistol in his right hand—a peculiar pistol that Cranston recognized at once as an old long-barreled Luger of a type that had not been made for a very long time, and that was rarely seen in this country. Yet there was something unusual about the Luger, too. Something Cranston could not immediately place. His mind frowned as he considered why someone would carry such a pistol. It had only one major advantage—it was highly accurate over a longer distance than most pistols. An advantage offset by the inconvenience of the long barrel.

The stranger also carried a pair of binoculars on a strap over his shoulder. Even as Cranston watched, the man crouched and trained the binoculars toward the Lakeview Inn. Cranston knew at once that the binoculars were infrared glasses for seeing at night. Cranston watched the man for a moment, and heard the stealthy approach of Stanley and Harry Vincent who were converging behind the stranger. Except that the man was not a stranger. Small, compact and slender, the intruder was the special investigator for the crime commission; Walter Bailey's assistant, Allen Richards.

Cranston rose up like a wraith emerging from the earth directly in front of where Richards watched the inn. The investigator quickly raised his long-barreled Luger. Stanley and Harry Vincent spoke simultaneously from behind Richards.

"Hold it! Just keep the gun down!"

"Don't even twitch!"

Richards froze. His long-barreled pistol hung at his side. There was a faint smile on the investigator's face, and his eyes were alert. Then the smile became broad. He recognized Cranston.

"Cranston! Well, it seems we both have the same idea."

Cranston stepped close to Richards. "What idea would that be, Richards?"

"Having a few words with Faust's successor, Mario Tucci, alias The Turk," Richards said.

"You know Tucci?"

"Yes, Cranston, I know The Turk. I'd like to know why he was so interested in Max Goleta, and why he had him killed."

Cranston rubbed his chin, his face as impassive and quiet as ever. "Did he kill Goleta?"

"I'd say so. He talked with the owner, it happened moments after they talked. The police think it was a setup, the killing, and I think I'll agree with them at the moment."

Cranston smiled. "Only at the moment?"

"I reserve final opinion until I have all the facts, Cranston. But you need a working hypothesis, and Turk is my prime hypothesis now."

"And you came here to take him alone?"

Richards laughed softly in the night. "Hardly, Cranston, I'm a detective not a hero. No, I planned to watch him, make sure he was here with his boys, and then I intended to call the police. Is that your plan?"

"More or less," Cranston said quietly.

"Except that you brought some men. I don't think I know your men? May I turn?"

Richards was grinning. Cranston smiled, but before he answered he nodded imperceptibly to Harry Vincent. The agent understood—Cranston did not want Richards to see Vincent in his postman's uniform. Harry faded into the bushes.

"Of course," Cranston said. "That is my chauffeur, Stanley. The other man, who will be back in a moment, is one of my private assistants, Mr. Vincent."

Richards nodded to Stanley. "You always travel with an army, Cranston?"

"There are advantages to being rich, Richards," the wealthy industrialist said with a small smile. "I enjoy working with Commissioner Weston, but I also have to tend to my businesses. I'm afraid we wealthy people become accustomed to having a retinue. However, it does

come in handy at times like these. Stanley is also my personal bodyguard. It seems all rich men must have a bodyguard. Stanley is rather expert with weapons, and other skills."

Richards laughed again. "I'll bet he is! He looks like he could take on Turk and all his boys single-handed."

At that moment Harry Vincent reappeared, dressed in a plain business suit. Richards nodded greeting.

"Are you a combat expert also, Mr. Vincent?" Richards said.

"No, I'm afraid I'm the theoretical type," Harry said. "All this is a bit out of my line, but the boss needed a hand."

Richards nodded. "If I know Turk, we need plenty of hands. But we seem to have them, eh? What say we tackle them ourselves? There are four of us, I can do my part if I do say so myself, and we have the surprise."

Since this was precisely what Cranston wanted, he pretended to consider it for a moment, and then nodded agreement.

"I think you may be right. It will be dawn soon, and they might make a move before we could get the police here. I don't much like the idea of trying to take them in the daylight. As a matter of fact, I'm not too anxious to tangle with them personally, I'm not the action type, but I see little choice. With you and Stanley, Richards, we might have a chance."

Again Richards laughed. An open, clear laugh. "Look at me, Cranston, I'm not exactly Mike Hammer or Mike Shayne myself. Far, far from James Bond. As Mr. Vincent so aptly put it, I'm the theoretical type. Strictly an organization man, we work with computers these days in the private eye business, not with muscles."

"From the look of that pistol, Richards, I'd say you can handle guns," Cranston said drily.

"I can shoot," Richards said. "That I admit. You have to have some qualifications. With a gun I'll match anyone."

"That's good to know," Cranston said. "All right, how about this for a plan. You and Harry cover the front. I'll take the rear. Stanley can cover both of you. From the

rear I'll make noise, flush them out. They'll come out the front where you and Harry can take them, and Stanley will be backing you up in case anything goes wrong."

Richards thought for a moment. "Good, with a couple of exceptions, I think. Let your Stanley take a spot where he can cover both Harry in front and you in back. I think he could do that nicely from that boat shack off to the right there. Then I think I'd better take the other side—I think there's a side door over there, and they just might try getting out that way. From my experience, the Mafia hate to come out a front door. I can hold my fire when you start, maybe lure them my way. When they come out, whoever sees them first gives a signal, a big, loud whistle. How's that?"

Cranston looked toward the boat shack. He had to admit that Richards' modifications were sound. It spread their forces thin, with each man alone, but with only four men the plan was probably sound. He, of course, had a plan of his own in mind. Richards had taken no account of Margo imprisoned in the inn. Because, of course, Richards did not know that Margo was being held by Turk. Cranston had no intention of telling the special investigator. That would have been hard to explain without revealing the presence and work of The Shadow. The secret of The Shadow could never be revealed. Therefore, the true plan Cranston had in mind had to remain his own secret. There would be no attack. There would be no need when The Shadow had done his work. But Cranston agreed to the plan. It might be much better, giving him three sides of the inn open to remove Margo without Richards knowing that she was there.

"A good plan," Cranston said. "I suggest we implement it without delay. We do not have much time before dawn now."

"Right," Richards said. "You start first, Cranston. You have the farthest to go to reach your position. I'll take off next to get to my spot. Shall we synchronize watches?"

They synchronized watches. Richards nodded.

"Fine. Then, say, give us five minutes after you reach your position. Then you start firing and send them out."

The four men nodded. Cranston readied his automatic,

and moved off through the bushes, skirting the inn and going behind the boat shack to the right. He vanished from the sight of the other three.

There was a silence, and then it was not Cranston who emerged in the night from behind the boat shack, it was the black-shrouded figure of The Shadow.

8

MARGO LANE sat bound to the straight wooden chair in the center of the large lobby of the Lakeview Inn. She sat there, now, as herself, the scrubwoman disguise taken from her when they had found her in the closet of the kitchen in The Harbor Bar & Grill. The change was impossible to believe. The Mafia hoodlums, capturing a scrubwoman, had found, instead, a shock. Beneath the stringy grey hair, the wrinkled old skin, the watery eyes, the gap-tooth smile of a crone, and the filthy old clothes —they had found Margo.

She was a striking woman. Her shining dark hair framed an intelligent face. More than intelligent, her eyes revealed a bright mind that was sharp and quick. She watched the sweating men who towered over her chair. Not all of them looked at her with the cold eyes of the dapper, grey-haired leader. The younger men did not entirely have their minds on their work. Their minds seemed to stray continually to her long, slim legs bound tightly together now.

The older man, Marco Tucci, alias Mr. Turk, had his mind on other, if perhaps not really more important, matters. Turk was wondering about the disguise of this woman, about who she was and what she wanted. The disguise had been perfect, and Turk wondered how such a young woman could be so expert, who such an expert young woman could be working for. He did not know that Margo's skill in disguise came from two sources: her

brief but intensive work in the theater after college in her native Denver; and her years as the right hand and first agent of The Shadow. Turk only knew that this woman had been in The Harbor Bar & Grill in disguise and snooping around the kitchen near the secret room. For hours he had been trying to find out why.

Turk leaned down close to her face. "You listen, lady, I'm tired, you hear? I'm tired. So far I took it easy. I ask, I ask nice, okay? Now maybe I got to get rough, yeh? You don't want me to get rough?"

"No," Margo said. "I don't want you to get rough."

"Good," Turk said, straightened up and looked down at her. "So you tell me who you are, and who you work for?"

"No," Margo said.

Turk turned red. "What were you snooping around for!"

"I lost my garter," Margo said with a sweet smile. Her bright eyes mocked the dapper, grey-haired leader. Behind Turk his men snickered. Turk whirled.

"Shut up! You hear? You shut up, all of you! You think it's funny, maybe?"

The younger men paled. "No, Turk, no. We . . ."

"Okay, it ain't funny you keep shut unless I tell you to open your big mouths!"

Turk turned back to face Margo. She smiled. The dapper Mafia leader did not smile. His small eyes had become slits.

"So, you play a little game with The Turk? Okay, let's all have fun, eh? We all play a little game. Jo-Jo!"

One of the young men jumped as if bitten. He paled, but stepped toward Turk. The leader did not even look at him. Turk snapped his fingers, stared at Margo with a small smile on his dapper face, and spoke without turning.

"Get the razor."

Jo-Jo looked at Margo. Turk, waiting, half turned to blink wide-eyed at the younger man.

"You don't hear, maybe?"

Jo-Jo paled more. "Sure, Mr. Turk, sure. The razor."

Jo-Jo went to get the razor. Turk stood half smiling

down at Margo bound to the chair. The dapper leader formed his thin lips into a soundless whistle, some tune only he could hear. The other young men stood nervously, licked their dry lips. They were thinking of the beauty of the woman in the chair. Jo-Jo returned. He carried a black-handled straight razor. Turk held out his hand without looking again at Jo-Jo. The younger man placed the razor in Turk's hand. He gave Turk the long, brown razor strop.

"So, you like games? Such a pretty girl to like games," Turk said.

"That depends on the game," Margo said, eyeing the razor.

Turk smiled his half smile, continued to whistle his soundless tune, as he attached the strop to the upright of the chair where Margo was bound. He began to strop the razor, just behind her, slow strokes close to her ear and away again. Every now and then he tested the edge of the razor, frowned, and began to strop again.

"Such a pretty face. Young, too. Very sad," Turk said as he slowly stropped.

"Nice, your face. Very nice. The nose, you know? Maybe the cheeks. Too bad, they don't look so good with scars. The nose don't look nice at all with a big scar."

Margo watched Turk, her eyes turned as far as they could turn to look at the shiny razor, the glistening edge. Turk leaned down close, his face inches from her face.

"You got muscles, you know, right in the corner of the eye. Real small muscles. They get cut it's funny how different you look, you know? You ever see someone got no muscles left in the eye? Very sad. Not so pretty no more. Too bad."

Turk, bent down and staring eye to eye, smiled. For a long moment they stared nose to nose. Then, slowly, Margo let her face break into a wide, pleasant, open smile straight into the smile of the Turk. The leader raised up. Stared at her.

"Okay, so you're a tough cookie. Let's see maybe how tough. Jo-Jo! Hold her. I ain't got no more time. Hold her good!"

Jo-Jo stepped forward to hold Margo. The other men

gathered around, moved forward, licked their lips in slight, almost involuntary excitement. There was going to be blood, quick blood from the face of the pretty woman bound in the chair. There might be screams, at least a cry of pain, and, perhaps, even a moan or two. Their eyes, that had been admiring the woman before them not minutes ago, now seemed to blaze with the expectation of seeing her face cut open, her beauty ruined, disfigured forever. Excitement ran through the room, through the hovering men, as Turk stepped forward and raised the razor.

They were so intent on the blood and pain to come that no one saw the great black shape that seemed to rise up out of the shadows of the large room. So intent on the screams they hoped for that even the two who had been on watch at the windows inched away from their posts, staring toward Margo and the gleaming razor. No one in the room heard the black-shrouded figure of The Shadow. No one saw the two burning eyes that glowed mercilessly toward them from under the wide brim of the black slouch hat.

No one except Margo.

The dark-haired woman, facing all of them as they gathered around her, saw the shape and the fiery eyes of her chief over their excited shoulders. Nothing showed on her face. She did not move a muscle, but continued to smile faintly and stare at the razor and the cruel face of The Turk behind it. The dapper leader spoke once more.

"Last chance, baby. Who are you, what did you want? This is it. Talk or I cut. I cut real good."

The eerie laugh seemed to rock the room.

"Yes, Mario Tucci! This is it!"

The voice boomed out hard and chilling.

Razor in hand, The Turk spun around. The others dove for cover behind chairs, tables, clawing for their guns. The two who had been at the windows leaped back toward their posts. The Shadow laughed.

"You are powerless!" his voice boomed.

Then, at the moment the power of his mind was sending out its inexorable clouds, reaching into the brains be-

hind the eyes that tried to find him in the deep shadows of the large room, a fusillade of shots broke out from the far side of the house. Bullets whined and spat through the room. The Shadow was forced to crouch down. His brain concentrated on The Turk. The Mafia leader, his razor thrown away, was trying to free his gun from the shoulder holster where it seemed to be stuck. His head felt foggy, would not clear. But the others, freed from the paralyzing stare of The Shadow's eyes, from the directed power of his brain, had run into other rooms and were firing through the windows.

The Shadow saw that there would not be time now to cloud their minds, to spirit Margo away before he returned outside to give his signal to the others. Something had gone wrong outside. There was no time. The battle was on, and Margo, still bound to the chair, was in the direct line of the wild firing. The Shadow leaped up and across the room. With a single blow of his hand he dropped The Turk in a senseless heap on the floor. The others, busy firing outside where Stanley and Harry Vincent had joined the battle now, saw nothing of the great black shape that felled their leader. They did not care about their leader now, too busy caring about their own lives. They saw nothing of the hawklike swoop of the shrouded figure as it swept up Margo, chair and all, and moved like a wraith through the large room and out the rear into the dark of the night itself. The dark already was beginning to turn to dawn as The Shadow vanished into the thick bushes toward the lake, Margo still bound to the chair he carried with him.

Those in the room saw none of this, but three other men, running up from somewhere at the edge of the lake, saw the black-garbed Avenger carrying Margo across a clearing and down toward the lake. Brought by the firing, the newcomers did not know what had happened, or who the enemy was, but they knew that the weird shape before them was not one of their own. Instantly they opened fire. They poured a withering fire directly toward the strange and unearthly figure in the night. A figure made even stranger and harder to see by the shifting shades of a slowly breaking dawn.

A mocking laugh in the night greeted their shots.
They fired at the laugh.
The laugh came again from a spot many yards away.
They fired in that direction.
The chilling laugh mocked them from behind them.
They whirled.
The laugh came again from where it had come first.
Cursing, they fired blindly at anything that seemed to move.

Then they became rigid. They stopped firing. Before them The Shadow suddenly appeared, his eyes blazing, both hands holding heavy .45 automatics. In sudden panic they raised their weapons to fire, but they were too late. The Shadow blazed with both automatics and the three men fell in the hail of accurate bullets from the weapons of the Avenger.

There was a sudden silence. Only the laugh of the black Avenger of evil filled the dawn sky.

The Shadow returned to where Margo still sat in the safety of a large tree. He bent and cut her bonds. The dark-haired woman stood up, rubbed her wrists.

"What do you want me to do?" Margo asked.

The Shadow did not answer. His hawklike nose was turned away. His eyes burned as he listened to the silence.

There was only silence now.

"Quick, Margo, something is wrong again. The battle should not have ended so quickly."

Followed by the freed Margo, The Shadow moved quickly back through the silent trees and bushes toward the inn. He had reached the edge of the last bushes before the frame lodge, with Margo close behind him and armed with one of his automatics, when he stopped. The Shadow held up his hand, listened.

On the lake, at the shore below where he stood, The Shadow heard the sound of a motor starting. Margo heard the sound at the same instant. Loud in the dawn, a motor had started.

"A boat, Margo!" The Shadow said.

"They have a boat. I heard Turk mention it!" Margo cried.

"They're getting away! Quick, Margo!"

The Shadow raced through the dawn light, a giant black shape flying toward the lake. But this time even The Shadow was too late. Already out on the lake and moving rapidly away was a powerful motorboat. Soon it vanished into the darkness that still covered the surface of the water as the sky above the mountains beyond was a morning grey.

"They've gone, Chief," Margo said as she came up behind The Shadow.

"Yes, Margo, but not for long. They will not go far. Not far enough to escape The Shadow," and the laugh of the Avenger echoed across the lake in mocking pursuit of the speeding powerboat.

"Come!" The Shadow commanded.

Together, the black-garbed crimefighter and his first assistant returned through the trees and bushes to the now silent Lakeview Inn. At the rear door of the inn they were met by Stanley. The chauffeur and bodyguard smiled at Margo, but frowned to his chief.

"What happened, Stanley?"

"I don't know, Chief. Richards started firing. We thought it was your signal."

"Where is Richards?"

"On the other side of the house. Harry Vincent is with him. We found Richards knocked out."

The Shadow turned to Margo. "The commission knows nothing of The Shadow, Margo. I wish to keep it that way. Richards will report if he sees you. He would put two and two together if he saw Lamont Cranston's secretary here. Go and wait in the car, remain hidden in the back."

"Yes, Chief," the dark-haired woman said. She turned and blended into the greying light.

The Shadow turned back to Stanley. "You and Harry are uninjured?"

"Not a scratch."

"Good, and the others?"

"Three dead. Some wounded, maybe, I don't know. The rest made it out the side where Richards was knocked out. They got to their boat, I guess, Chief."

The Shadow nodded grimly. "They did, Stanley, but

that will not help them in the end. Come, I want to talk to Richards."

Stanley led the way around the side of the large lodge. When he turned again, as they neared where Harry Vincent stood over the seated Allen Richards, The Shadow was no longer behind him. The man behind Stanley now was Lamont Cranston. Richards looked up as the two men reached him. The special investigator smiled wryly.

"I was spotted," Richards said. "One of the outside men. Darned careless, Cranston. We should have anticipated outside guards, too."

Cranston had to agree. "We should have. The Mafia are careful."

"Too careful," Richards said. "When I was spotted, I fired at once, but the guard was too quick and I missed. Then all hell busted loose. They are mighty trigger happy, Cranston. If I didn't know better, I'd say the Mafia are scared of something."

"Scared?" Cranston said slowly.

Richards nodded. "I'd say these guys were scared of something. Now maybe it's the campaign against them in the city, and maybe it's some kind of intra-Mafia fight, I don't know. It could even be some other organization trying to take them over."

Since this was much the same as Cranston himself thought, again he had to agree. But he did not want to agree too much with Richards—he did not want to reveal how much The Shadow knew. Richards had not seen The Shadow, and he had not seen Margo.

"I don't know," Cranston said. "Do you have any evidence of some other factor?"

"No, not yet, but I feel something. I'd like to know more about the governor, and even the mayor. But right now I'd like to catch that Turk. I could get something out of him."

Cranston nodded. "All right, Richards. I have to get back to Santa Carla, but why don't you and Harry circle the lake and try to pick up their trail? That seems to me about the best way."

"Agreed," Richards said. "We better take separate cars, they will probably split up."

"Good. You're sure you feel up to it?"

"I'll be okay," Richards said.

The four men then left the area of the Lakeview Inn, and headed for their cars. Harry Vincent, at a nod from Cranston, helped Richards. Cranston and Stanley went on ahead. They got Margo from the Rolls-Royce and took her to the hidden mail truck. Then Cranston waited for Harry Vincent and Richards.

"Take the Rolls, Harry," Cranston said, and he said to Richards. "Your car is near."

Richards nodded. "Just down the road. I'll get it and come by. Harry can follow me."

Richards went off to his car. Harry Vincent got into the Rolls-Royce and waited for the special investigator to come by. Richards soon appeared driving his dark green Ford, and Harry drove the Rolls-Royce off after him. Cranston watched the two cars vanish down the road in the grey dawn. Then he joined Stanley and Margo in the mail truck. They turned in the other direction and returned to Santa Carla as the city began to stir and awaken for another day.

9

THE DAY'S session of the special crime commission would not begin until the afternoon, and even Cranston needed some sleep. But by eleven o'clock that morning he was awake again. Awake and thinking. The pieces of the puzzle would not fit, but he was sure of one thing—Richards was right that the Mafia was worried about something. That had been more than clear from Margo's story last night. Cranston continued to think alone until he heard a noise in the next room of his hotel suite. Margo was moving around. Dressed, the wealthy socialite alter-ego of The Shadow went into the room of his secretary. Margo, fresh and rested, smiled at her boss.

"Good morning, Lamont."

"How do you feel?"

"Fine," Margo said, and looked into the mirror above her dressing table. "More than fine. I didn't particularly like that razor. You arrived at a very good moment last night."

Cranston began to pace. "Let's start from the beginning again and see what we really know."

"All right, Lamont."

Cranston smiled. "Good, but a little breakfast first. Call down, will you, Margo. I think some sausage and eggs for me, I find I'm starved."

They chatted lightly until the breakfast came. Then, over their food and an enormous pot of coffee, Cranston got down to work. His hooded eyes seemed half asleep as Margo told her story once again.

"They caught me in that closet. I managed to drop the radio purse without them seeing me. They were very agitated, Lamont. They hustled me out to a car and drove me straight to the Lakeview Inn. They tied me up, but at first, and for quite some time, they only took turns asking me questions. It was lucky for me they took so long getting around to that razor."

Cranston nodded. "Tell me again exactly what questions they asked you."

"The normal questions, Lamont," Margo said. "They wanted to know who I was, who I worked for, what I wanted in the Harbor Bar and Grill, who the boss of my 'outfit' was. All of that. They kept hammering, one after the other. Over and over—who did I work for, what was I doing spying on them, what did I know about the killing of Jimmy Faust."

"They asked you about Faust?"

"Yes, Lamont. They also asked me a couple of times if I had been the woman who was with Faust."

Cranston rubbed his chin and sipped his coffee, his impassive face set in thought. "They *asked* you about that woman? That's very strange, Margo. According to the police report Richards read to the commission, the Bell girl claimed to have been with Faust, a girl friend of Faust's.

In which case, why wouldn't the Mafia have known who she was and what she was doing with Faust?"

"Perhaps they know the Bell woman, Lamont, but they don't know she was the one who was there. After all, she went to the police. She might easily have not told them she was with Faust, and perhaps he had good reasons for not telling anyone before hand."

Cranston nodded. "I suppose that is possible, Margo. Still, you would think the Mafia would have ways of finding a woman with a police record and who associated with one of their leaders."

Margo seemed to think. "You have a point, Lamont. But I gathered that Turk is from out of town. Perhaps he just hasn't had time to learn enough yet. Or perhaps there is a sort of civil war going on within the Mafia."

"Perhaps," Cranston said.

"They were very jumpy, Lamont. They seemed very nervous to me, all except Turk. They seemed, well, puzzled, too. You know? I mean, the way they talked, asked questions, I'm sure that there is something they are trying to find out, something they don't know. They're in the dark about some aspect of all this, Lamont."

Cranston nodded and stood up. The wealthy socialite began to pace the sunny hotel suite. Margo sat quietly sipping her coffee and watching the quiet face of her boss, the hooded eyes that were deep in concentration. Cranston seemed to be going over everything his photographic memory could recall of the affair. From the expression on his face he was not nearly satisfied with the facts nor the explanations so far. After a time, the handsome socialite and industrialist sighed.

"I'm afraid, Margo, that we are all in the dark. But I am sure of one thing—there is something about all this that just doesn't smell right. I've got the strangest feeling that the Mafia are not the villains of this, but the *victims!*"

Cranston continued to pace, his impassive face set in a frown. Margo watched him for a time. Then the dark-haired woman lighted a cigarette, blew smoke into the sunny air of the suite, and spoke slowly.

"There was one other thing, Lamont. I don't know how important it is, or even what it means, but they asked me

about something, or someone else. A name, I think. Si Fir, or Si Frere, or Sipper or something like that."

"A name?" Cranston said quickly.

Margo nodded. "The way they asked, it seemed like it was a person. They wanted to know who Si Fur, or Cy Frere, was. They asked if I knew what it meant. I didn't, of course."

"Si? Simon something? And they gave you no idea just who this man is?"

"They wanted to know from me."

"Did they give some idea of the context? In what respect they had come in contact with the name?"

"No, except that I gathered this person is not a friend in any way. I got the idea it all had something to do with the killing of Faust."

Cranston paced. "It all has something to do with the killing of Faust. Are you sure of that name?"

"No, Lamont. I don't think *they* were. They kept saying it in a different way. It could even have been Piper."

"Man or woman? Could it refer to a woman?"

"I suppose it could be anything, Lamont."

"All right, Margo. Let's do this logically. What do we know?"

The socialite paced the suite. Margo sat quietly, smoking and waiting. Cranston's hooded eyes closed for a time. When they opened there was a momentary flash of the fire of The Shadow's eyes.

"The mayor, Mayor Rush, declared an open war on organized crime in Santa Carla. In less than a month the police had made little or no headway—and five separate people had been shot down in the streets without clues of any kind, or any hints as to who or even why. On the face of it, it looks like a gang war series of killings. It underlines the need to rid the city of organized crime."

"Don't you think it does that, Lamont?" Margo said.

"Yes, Margo, there is no doubt that the five killings point up the need for the mayor's anticrime crusade. What else they might mean, we don't know. The police can't seem to find out. Now, after the five killings we come upon two more, only these two don't fit the pattern.

"In one case Mayor Rush himself killed Jimmy Faust,

known local Mafia leader. He claims he was lured to the spot by Faust on a pretext of talking, and fired in self-defense. All the facts point to the truth of his story. At almost the same time, Drake Hind, district attorney, gets a telephone call, rushes out, and is murdered in his car in an obvious trap. A small-time Mafia man is picked up at the scene, and later commits suicide.

"This causes the mayor to suspend himself and call in an outside crime commission. Mayor Rush appoints Walter Bedsole Bailey as chairman, and leaves the rest of the commission up to Bailey. With a lot of consultations with the governor, the senators, the Congressional delegation, and Federal officials, Bailey forms his commission.

"At this point we came into the affair. Since then, Mario Tucci, alias The Turk, has been seen watching the jail, has had an interview with Max Goleta, has captured and questioned you. Goleta has been killed. Lieutenant Moss has been killed by an unidentified woman. Someone named Si something, or Piper, is involved. Young men wearing black jackets and riding motorcycles have become involved. And the crime commission is mounting an all-out war on the Mafia."

Cranston stopped. Margo watched her boss. The summation had been complete. Cranston continued his pacing in silence for some time. Then he faced Margo again.

"So, we have some questions. There is still something not quite right about the killing of Faust at the El Capitan. If there isn't something more, why was Max Goleta killed? Lieutenant Moss was not satisfied with the way Faust died, I'm sure of that, and Moss was killed. Who is the woman who killed Moss, and who are the black-jacketed cyclists?"

Cranston frowned. "I particularly don't like the woman at the El Capitan. Goleta swears there was a woman, he even was sure she was the one killed. But no woman was found. Instead, Faust was dead. Later the woman came to Lieutenant Moss. A woman named Penny Bell. In the first place she's not the type who would come forward unless she had to. She had a record, she had no reason to help the police. On top of that, Margo, she had been arrested only four weeks ago, and that is strange if she

was, as she said, Jimmy Faust's girl. A man like Faust could have protected her, and I don't think he would have gotten mixed up with such a woman—too dangerous."

Margo agreed. "That's a big point, Lamont. A small-time B-girl? For Jimmy Faust? It doesn't sound logical."

"No, not logical at all. And where is she now? Margo, I think that Penny Bell is our key. We have to find her. She has a husband. A woman like her does not disappear easily. No, she has to be somewhere, and we must find her."

"How, Lamont? Max Goleta is dead."

Cranston nodded. "Yes, but someone at the El Capitan must know something. I think, Margo, it is time for The Shadow to visit the El Capitan."

"What about me?"

"You remain here in contact with Burbank. Harry Vincent may call in with information on Turk and his men. Also, I want you to call Commissioner Weston and make my excuses for the crime commission meeting this afternoon. Plead urgent business for my companies. I would like them to think I am a busy amateur anyway."

"All right, Lamont," Margo agreed. "Will you take Stanley?"

"No, Margo, this is work for The Shadow alone. I will take the small car. Tell Stanley I want all known motorcycle clubs in the area checked out. See if any of them fit our unknown young men."

Without another word, the socialite left the room and the suite. He rode down alone in the elevator and emerged in the garage beneath the hotel. There he entered a small, black Jaguar. The fast, specially built sports car came out into the sun of Santa Carla. It moved swiftly through the city toward the El Capitan Motel. It moved much too fast for anyone to see that the man behind the wheel wore a black cloak, had a long hawk nose and fiery eyes that blazed from beneath a wide slouch hat—The Shadow.

The El Capitan Motel was set back from the main highway out of Santa Carla. A cinder drive led up to the office. The other units, scattered around in double buildings,

were all quiet in the sun. A heavy calm rested on the motel in the afternoon hours of a hot day. There was a silence, a lack of motion, and yet as if the shabby motel were holding its breath waiting for something to happen.

Frieda Goleta, wife of the late owner of the El Capitan, who should have been in the office, was in her dim living quarters behind the office. Frieda was "resting." To the short, heavy, blonde woman, "resting" had a special meaning. In the darkened living room, all shades drawn, all windows tightly closed, Frieda was drinking.

She sat—a thick, froglike shape—in the best chair in the room, her eyes fixed on the front door that led into the motel office. There was a glass, a tumbler, in her fat hand. The bottle was on the floor. A cheap bottle of blended rye. A bucket of ice stood near her on a table. In her tumbler there was one melting ice cube and a great deal of pure brown whisky.

Frieda often "rested," and often sat in the darkened living quarters—but not with the windows locked and the doors locked. Frieda was afraid. She sat, drank, stared at the locked door. Each time she drank she wiped her mouth with the back of her pudgy hand, leaving a smear of dirt each time. She drank often.

"Darn you, Max! The big deal! You got to be the big deal!"

She drank, wiped, stared at the door.

"Darn you, Max! What about me? You couldn't keep quiet?"

She drank, wiped, shivered.

"I don't even know who!"

She drank and stared at the door. When the glass was empty she picked up the bottle without looking at it, poured another tumblerful of the cheap whisky, dropped in a single ice cube, swirled the liquid, and drank. She opened her mouth to speak again.

The macabre laugh came from somewhere in the shifting light and dark near her kitchen.

Frieda whirled in her seat, as pale as chalk, gasping. "Who?"

The chilling laugh came from a dark corner near the TV set this time.

Frieda spilled her drink, slopped the whisky over her sleezy dress, sucked greedily at the brown liquid. Her eyes darted like the eyes of a hunted weasel.

"Who is it? I don't know, you hear? He never told me nothing! You hear me? He's dead, who cares? He never told me!"

Then she saw the figure, shape, and the blazing eyes under the brim of the wide black hat. She saw the long, scythelike nose that seemed to slash the dim room. The figure did not move. It loomed there, ominous and deadly in the far corner.

"I don't know nothing," the woman, Frieda, whimpered.

She stared transfixed at the macabre shape that seemed to hover there in the corner. Her hands shook so badly she had to take hold of her glass in both hands, the whisky slopping over.

"Go away," Frieda said, whimpering.

The eerie voice laughed again. A long laugh that seemed to echo and fill the room, the silent room shut away in the afternoon heat.

"You are afraid, Frieda Goleta!" a deep, cold voice said.

The woman shivered.

"You fear that they will kill you too," the voice said.

Frieda shook, drank, and then seemed to hear the words clearly. She looked up at the black shape that blended away into the dimness of the room.

"They?" Frieda said.

"Those who killed your husband."

"You're . . . you're not from . . . them?" the woman stammered.

The Shadow laughed. "No, Frieda, I am not from them. I hunt them! I hunt down all killers, all evil. I want to know who killed Max Goleta."

Frieda stared, shrugged. "I don't know."

"Do you know any who wanted to kill him?"

Frieda drank, stared into her glass. The woman's thick shoulders hunched inward, her fleshy face set in stubborn silence. The eyes of The Shadow blazed. The fire-opal

girasol glowed on his long, powerful finger. His fiery eyes bored deep into the woman.

"Who wanted to kill him, Frieda!" The Shadow demanded.

Frieda shook her head, brushed her thick hand across her eyes. Her mind grew thick, foggy, as if a cloud had rolled through her brain. A thick, shifting cloud settled on her mind. She felt herself becoming helpless. A powerful hand seemed to reach deep into her mind and take hold. Helpless, the glass dropped from her nerveless fingers. A cloud covered her mind. Her will was gone.

"Who?" The Shadow demanded.

Her lips moved. "The Mafia. Yeh, maybe the Mafia. I don't know. Faust was killed. They don't like that. Max was a fool. The Mafia killed him. That Turk."

"You're sure?" the strong voice demanded.

"The Mafia. No, I ain't sure. Who else? There was the woman. Max saw her. Then she was gone."

The voice of The Shadow was softer now, but still strong, insistent. The voice seemed to fill every part of her body, to enter and take control.

"Start and tell me all you know," The Shadow said. "I will avenge your husband. His killers will learn how bitter a fruit is born by the weed of crime!"

Frieda nodded, her hands slack at her sides where she sat thick and heavy in the chair in the dim room shut away from the sun of the city. "Max seen her. She went into the cabin. She registered. A phony name, John Smith. Mr. and Mrs. John Smith. Max seen her go in, and then he seen *him*. The mayor, yes. Later, maybe a half an hour. Max don't recognize him right away because he don't show his face. But it was the mayor."

"Could it have been Faust that Max saw, not Mayor Rush?" The Shadow asked sharply.

"No, Faust was a lot smaller. Max didn't see Faust. Maybe Faust was already inside, Max don't know. Only he never saw no one else go in before them shots! Just the girl, and the man who don't show his face. Max don't think nothing, until he hears them shots and the girl scream."

"Scream! He heard the girl scream?" The Shadow hissed, demanded.

"Yeh, that's when he called the cops. Only when they got here, the fuzz, Faust was shot and there wasn't no woman."

The Shadow's eyes blazed. "Had you seen that woman before? Have you seen her since?"

"I seen her around before, don't know her name. I ain't seen her since. A guy came around once, said he was her husband. I ain't seen him again. A broad like her, with a husband."

"You know nothing else?"

"No," the woman said.

The Shadow knew that she told the truth. Her mind in his power, she could not have lied now. He would learn no more from Frieda Goleta. But he had learned one thing—Goleta had heard a woman scream *after* the shots!

With his total power, The Shadow clouded the mind of the woman until she slumped asleep in her chair. When she awakened she would remember only the vaguest of sensations. She would sit there and it would be as if she had had a dim dream, vague and unremembered. She would drink again with only a slight sense of something having happened, and no memory of the great black shape that now vanished as silently as it had come.

10

THE RAILROAD TRACKS ran behind the dilapidated rooming house at 407 South Perdido Street in Santa Carla. The tracks opened into the freight yards a block away, and all around the blight hung like a mist on the area. The people who lived here lived their lives with their heads bent, their eyes on the ground. Or they lived inside bottles. They were busy staying alive, these people, they had no time to bother with passing strangers who did not enter their lives.

They barely glanced at the small but powerful Jaguar that eased quietly into the shadows behind an abandoned railroad shack a block from 407 South Perdido Street. They did not see the shadowy figure that emerged from the Jaguar and blended into the shadows of the shack itself. A shadowy figure that moved all but unseen even in the afternoon sun. It flitted silently from building to building, appearing for an instant in the sunny open areas, vanishing again in the shadows of the broken down old houses. The figure worked its way toward 407 South Perdido Street.

Hidden, The Shadow peered with his fiery eyes toward the front steps of Number 407, the home of Penny Bell and her husband. There was nothing unusual about the four storey frame house, nothing that distinguished it from its shabby neighbors. Peeling grey paint, a vague attempt to enhance its appearance with white-painted trim and a few drooping flowers in window boxes, and the usual signs in the downstairs front window—ROOMS. There was nothing at all special about the house, but something very special about what was going on at this moment in front of the rooming house. From where he was hidden, The Shadow watched the unusual activity.

Parked directly in front of the door there was a kind of ambulance. It was not a city ambulance, or a private hospital ambulance. It was a private ambulance, the type that was hired from an ambulance service. The ambulance sat there, the two white-uniformed attendants lounging against the front fender. Parked behind the ambulance was a black, unmarked car that The Shadow recognized as a car from the Santa Carla Police Department. The car was empty, but a man in plainclothes stood above on the steps. Then, even as The Shadow watched, a man came out of the house and nodded to the ambulance men. The burning eyes of The Shadow narrowed, watched. The man was commission member Morgan Slater!

Slater and the two white-suited attendants went into the building. Moments later, the man in plainclothes on the steps looked up and saw another man approaching. The plainclothes policeman stepped forward, and then smiled. He had recognized the man approaching—Lamont

Cranston, special investigator for the crime commission. The detective smiled, nodded his head toward the door into the rooming house.

"They're inside, Mr. Cranston. Pretty sad sight."

"Hank Bell?" Cranston guessed.

"Yeah. Looks like it really got to him."

Cranston said no more, but walked past the detective and entered the shabby building. He found himself in a dingy hall that smelled of the damp mustiness of years. There was little light, and nothing moved along the dank hall with its faded and threadbare carpeting. Cranston listened. He heard the voices upstairs. Silently he went up the stairs to the second floor where a door stood open into the room at the front of the rooming house. Cranston walked to the door and looked inside. The sight that greeted him was like a tableaux from some macabre wax-work museum.

Just inside the door, Morgan Slater puffed on a pipe, his eyes flat and without expression. Beside Slater, Chairman Walter Bailey was talking. Bailey talked sadly but earnestly, and Slater listened with his head bent. What they were talking about, what their eyes were looking at even as they talked low to each other, sat in a rocking chair in the center of the small, shabby room. A tall, thin man who rocked back and forth, back and forth. His eyes were flat, like black points in his head. His hands were folded in his lap. He stared at nothing, but only rocked and rocked. Faint moans, like long sighs, escaped from his lips every few moments. Behind the man, on the dresser, Cranston saw a familiar picture in a cheap brass frame —a picture of Penny Bell.

Morgan Slater turned, saw Cranston. The burly expert criminologist frowned. "What are you doing here, Cranston?"

"I was following down a lead on Penny Bell," Cranston said mildly. "That, I gather, is Henry Bell in the chair?"

The cold-eyed Slater nodded. Walter Bailey looked sadly at the man who rocked continuously in the chair.

"I had the same idea, Cranston," Walter Bailey said. The older man seemed sad, his strong, distinguished face looking down at Bell with pity. "Richards mentioned

wanting to talk to Bell. But Allen was busy this morning, so I called off the afternoon session and decided to have a look for Bell myself, see what he could tell us about his wife. I found him like this."

Bailey indicated the rocking man who sat and stared and moaned softly, totally unaware that there was anyone else in the room. Morgan Slater muttered testily.

"It seems we all had a similar idea. I'll bet Bauermann and Weston show up. We've got to work more efficiently, stop duplicating all this effort," Slater said. He looked shrewdly at Cranston. "I thought your secretary reported that you had business to attend to, Cranston?"

"I completed it earlier than I expected," Cranston said quietly. "Which one of you found him first?"

"I did," Slater said. "Just like that, rocking and moaning. Obviously complete schizophrenia. Almost catatonic."

"I came soon after," Bailey said. "Then we sent for the private ambulance. What else can we do? I've arranged for him to be put into a private sanitarium in the Sierras."

Cranston watched the rocking Bell. "Have you tried to talk to him?"

"Of course," Bailey said. "Both of us. We can't reach him. He's unreachable now, Cranston. Perhaps after months of work, treatment, at the sanitarium we could begin to reach him, but there's no chance now."

"Hopeless," Slater said. "Too bad, too. I think he must have known something—something he couldn't take. I think he was so scared his brain collapsed. It's a common defense mechanism of the body."

"Possibly, Morgan," Walter Bailey said. "But I'm inclined to think it's probably more to do with Faust and his wife. Obviously they were involved with each other, and Bell just couldn't accept it."

"Then where is Penny Bell?" Cranston said.

Bailey nodded. "That's my point. It looks like she just walked out on him. The shock was too much. Her involvement, Faust's death, and then she leaves him. The superintendent downstairs says he heard a fight or two up here since the death of Faust."

Cranston nodded and went to stand over the rocking man. Bell seemed unaware of Cranston's nearness. The man rocked back and forth, moaned softly from time to time, his hands folded neatly in his lap. Cranston studied the man. It was the eyes that interested him. Bell's eyes were like tiny black coals, the pupils small and intense and yet totally vacant. Cranston spoke softly.

"Where is Penny, Mr. Bell?"

The man rocked, did not even blink his flat, staring eyes.

"Tell us about Penny, Henry," Cranston said.

The man rocked. Cranston reached down and touched his arm. The man moved, winced, and then went on rocking. Showing no reaction that Slater or Bailey could have seen, Cranston looked at the man's arm where he had touched. He touched again. Bell moaned, winced. Under the cloth of the man's shirt Cranston felt a small swelling that only his sensitive fingers could have felt. His super eyes saw a tiny pin hole in the cloth of the shirt. Someone had used a hypodermic needle on Bell. Behind his impassive eyes, Cranston's mind considered the man and the hypodermic syringe. He had a strong suspicion that Henry Bell's condition was not natural after all—someone had drugged the man, some special drug to induce this catatonic state! A drug Cranston did not know. Who had done it? Why? He did not let his hooded eyes reveal any of these speculations to Bailey or Slater.

"You're right," Cranston said. "He can't be reached."

Bailey motioned to the white-suited attendants. They moved forward and took hold of Henry Bell. The man made no attempt to resist. The attendants led Bell out of the room and down the stairs. Cranston, Bailey and Slater followed them out into the sunny street. The attendants led Bell to the ambulance and placed him inside. Bell sat there, still rocking, still moaning softly, as they drove away. Bailey looked at Cranston.

"Can I give you a lift, Cranston? I'm afraid this was not very helpful."

"No, I have my car," Cranston said.

"I'll ride with you, Walter," Slater said. "I let my taxi go."

Bailey nodded. The two commission members got into the police car. The detective took the wheel. Cranston watched them drive away. Then he turned to walk back to where he had parked his Jaguar. But he did not walk beyond the first house. Instead, Cranston stopped in the shadow of the first house and seemed to disappear.

In the silent room where Henry Bell had been rocking only minutes earlier, nothing moved for some time. Then there was a faint creak, the door opened and closed silently, and The Shadow stood dark and shrouded in the room. For a long minute his fiery eyes glowed from beneath the wide slouch hat as he studied every inch of the room. Then he moved as silently as the wind across the room to the single dresser.

He opened, and studied closely, every drawer. The drawers were full. One drawer held the few shirts and ties and bits of jewelry that belonged to Henry Bell. The rest of the drawers contained the clothing of a woman. Expensive garments; and her jewelry was there, and boxes of the best stockings. His eyes narrowed and alert with their inner fire, The Shadow turned his attention to the closets.

The closets, too, were full. Dresses hung packed tightly in the two closets. Shoes rested on a rack at the bottom of one closet. On the top shelf of the same closet there were three suitcases, all empty. The Shadow closed the doors of the closets and continued his inspection of the room. Bottles of expensive perfume stood on a cheap table with a mirror over it, the perfume in sharp and gaudy contrast to the table and the room. In the bathroom, The Shadow found the medicine cabinet completely full. There were prescription bottles, full or partly full, in the name of Penelope Bell.

Back in the single bedroom-living room, The Shadow stood silently for a time in the center of the room, a tall black shape with fiery eyes under the brim of a wide slouch hat. Above the hawk nose the eyes flashed—Penny Bell had taken nothing with her—why? There was only one logical answer—Penny Bell was dead. Somewhere, somehow, the girl was dead.

Why?

The eyes of The Shadow blazed again as he asked himself that question—why was Penny Bell dead, if she was? Where did she fit in this? Something she had seen? Not the death of Faust, there was no question about who killed Faust. Did she know of the plans of the Mafia? That could be, and the Mafia could have killed her. Something she had told the police? No, nothing on the record showed that she had told them anything that they did not know. And Lieutenant Moss had not been satisfied *after* talking with her. She had walked into the police, and *after that* she had vanished. If she knew something dangerous to someone, *why kill her after she told?* Or had she held out something—a vital fact that had cost her her life?

If so, was there some clue here in her apartment?

Again, The Shadow searched the apartment. He found nothing he didn't find the first time. Until he found, in the drawer containing the few clothes of Henry Bell, a piece of note paper. On the paper was a single word, a time of day, and a sum of money. It read:

CYPHER 9:20 $25,000

The sum of money had been underlined many times. The time, 9:20, had been ringed with a thick box. The letters in the word, CYPHER, had been filled in, drawn on.

A telephone message, and Henry Bell, if the note did belong to him, had doodled as he talked on the telephone. The eyes of The Shadow studied the message. From the condition of ink and paper he knew that the note had been written very recently, less than a day ago at most. Which meant that at that time Henry Bell had been perfectly normal—if Bell had written the note. More and more the black-shrouded Avenger was sure that Henry Bell's catatonic state was not natural, had been chemically induced somehow.

But there was something even more important on the mind of The Shadow now. The word on the paper—CYPHER!

He remembered what Margo had reported. The Mafia

leader, Mr. Turk, had been interested in someone named Si Fur, or Piper, or Cy Frere, or something like that. CYPHER! But who, or what, was CYPHER? And what did Henry Bell have to do with CYPHER at 9:20 and for $25,000? A meeting and a payoff? The Shadow's eyes glinted in the silent room. It was obvious that the meeting had been kept, but it looked very much like the payoff had been in something other than money.

CYPHER? A code name? A place perhaps? The Shadow did not know yet. But one thing was certain; he had felt from the beginning that there was something missing, and CYPHER could be that missing thing. A cyclist club? Possible, and possibly something connected to the woman in the green dress he had found with the dead Lieutenant Moss.

Turning swiftly, The Shadow left the room and glided like a chimera down the stairs to the first floor. He stopped in front of the door marked: *Superintendent.* Silently he opened the door and slipped inside.

The room was dim. A man alone sat in front of a TV set with his shades drawn against the afternoon heat and sun. He was a small, thin, bald man dressed in work clothes, and he heard nothing above his baseball game until the eerie laugh reverberated through the room.

The man turned sharply, his face showing no fear of the weird sound.

"Who's there?"

The Shadow, hidden near the door, laughed again. "They call me The Shadow. You are superintendent of this building?"

"Shadow? Shadow? Get out of here!" The man peered into the corners of his room. "Where are you? What is this, some kind of trick?"

"This is no trick! You will answer some questions."

The man laughed. "I don't answer nothing, buddy. Show me where you are?"

Fearless, the peppery little man stared around his room. He reached for the light on the table near him. His hand seemed to stop halfway. Now the man seemed puzzled. He tried to push out his hand, but it would not go. He became aware of a weight, a thick cloud in his

mind. Then, vaguely, he saw a great black shape before him, two piercing eyes, the upper half of a face that glowed red in the darkness that seemed to fall over the room.

"A few questions," a voice said. "I will not harm you."

The man seemed to hesitate. Then he drew back his hand, sat and looked up at the looming shape. His face still showed no fear, only a certain curiosity.

"Okay, buddy, you've got me. It's quite a trick. Okay, what questions?"

The Shadow smiled. The peppery little man was either very brave or very stupid. It did not matter.

"Where is Penny Bell?"

"Who knows? That broad she comes 'n' goes."

"What happened to Henry Bell?"

"Nuts, right off his rocker. Over Penny, I heard them say, only that's crazy, you know? I mean, anyone who'd say Hank would go nuts over Penny is crazier than Hank. He knew all about her—and he didn't care."

"What if he knew she were dead?" The Shadow asked.

"He'd whistle Dixie and dance a twist."

"He didn't care about her?"

"He didn't care about nothin' except himself."

"What kind of woman was she?"

This time the little man hesitated again. Then he shrugged, aware that, somehow, his mind was not in his own control. He stared to see through the cloud that seemed to envelop his mind.

"She wasn't a bad kid, better than he was. Sure, she wanted nice things, and she liked a good time. Married to him she never got nothin'."

"You speak of her as if you knew she were dead?"

The man blinked. "Dead? Well, I don't know. She just ain't been around, not since the day after that Faust got his."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No. But Candy maybe does."

"Candy?" The Shadow demanded.

"Candy Smith, a friend of hers. Candy been around a couple times since to ask after her. She ain't been back for a while. Maybe she found Penny."

"Where does she live, this Candy Smith?"

The man shrugged. "Somewhere down the beach, a plush place. I remember she looked like she was doing good when she come here, 'n' she told me she lived in one of them plush places down by Arroyo Beach."

The Shadow stepped close to the man, let his mind fully concentrate on the little man's brain. The superintendent stiffened, tried to get up, and then slumped down asleep. The Shadow laughed softly, and left the sleeping man peaceful in his chair. The Avenger slipped from the room and out into the sunny street. Moving from shadow to shadow he returned to his Jaguar without ever being seen—a swift, flitting shadow in the sun.

11

THE BEACH BUNGALOW was set behind a high redwood fence in the middle of a lush garden of flowers. Palms and palmettoes shaded the six room "bungalow." Cranston sat in the late afternoon sun in his Jaguar and watched the place. Someone was inside. That would be Candy Smith.

After leaving 407 South Perdido, he had become Lamont Cranston again. With his credentials as special investigator for the crime commission, he had located Candy Smith through a modeling agency. A call had found her out, but her Japanese maid had assured him that Miss Candy would be in within the hour. Now he sat in the Jaguar and considered the bungalow. There was a vast difference between the bungalow and 407 South Perdido Street. Candy Smith was indeed "doing good," and perhaps this had some connection to what had happened to Penny Bell.

Cranston left his car and walked to the locked redwood gate. The Japanese maid answered his ring. She ushered him into the living room of the bungalow. A vast

picture window gave a magnificent view of the wide sand and sea of Arroyo Beach. The maid served him a drink, and he sat admiring the view. The woman who came into the room a few minutes later was even more magnificent than the view.

"Mr. Cranston? You're here about poor Penny?"

She was a tallish woman, blonde, her hair cut short but loose to the wind and surf. She had a voluptuous body, and her face looked like all the beautiful American faces in the Miss America Pageant. She wore a brief bikini that hid nothing, and the suit was still wet, indicating that she had been swimming.

"Poor Penny?" Cranston asked.

The girl, Candy, sat down and crossed her fine legs. She lighted a cigarette. She reached for the drink left for her by the maid. Then she suddenly wiped a tear from her eye.

"She's dead. I know she's dead!"

Cranston watched her from behind his hooded eyes. It was, of course, the same thought he had. He wanted to know what made Candy Smith think the same.

"Dead? You're sure?"

Candy nodded. "None of this is like Penny. Murder! The police! The Mafia! No, Mr. Cranston, I'm sure about it. Penny wouldn't have mixed with the Mafia, or the police. Even if she had been in that cabin at the El Capitan, the way that Lieutenant Moss said when he talked to me, she wouldn't have gone to the police. Penny wasn't brave."

"Moss talked to you?"

"Yes, right after he found out it was Penny in that cabin. Only I don't think it was Penny. We're awfully close friends. We've been around together a long time. She never mentioned Faust. Nor Mafia. She was really a good girl."

"You don't think she would have gone to the police?" Cranston asked. This, too, was a thought he, or The Shadow, had already had.

"No, and besides, if she were still alive she would have called me. We were very close."

Cranston reached into his pocket and brought out the

picture of Penny Bell he had found in the file of Lieutenant Moss. He handed it to the girl.

"It's Penny," Candy said.

"Then she went to the police all right. That was in the file of Lieutenant Moss," Cranston said.

Candy stared at the picture. Then the girl seemed to collapse inside. She slumped in her chair, smoked, and drank her drink.

"I guess I hoped it wasn't all true," the girl said. "I guess I wanted to believe. Yes, Mr. Cranston, that's Penny, and if she went to the police she was probably in the cabin. I guess she isn't dead, just mixed up with them after all!"

"Them?"

"The Mafia. If she isn't dead, and she hasn't contacted me, then she's mixed up in something bad. You know that no one has seen her? I asked around. That's why I was sure she was dead. If the police saw her, Mr. Cranston, they are the only ones who've seen her since the night Faust was killed!"

Candy stopped, smoked, drank again. "I should have known."

"Known what?" Cranston asked.

"Faust!" Candy said, almost spat. "I warned her about that kind of man. But she laughed at me."

"You know she was seeing Jimmy Faust?"

"No, not for sure. But she did have a new man, she told me that much. She said she had a very special new friend. She was excited that night."

"Special?" Cranston said.

Candy nodded. "That was what she said, very special. She didn't say rich, or important, or nice, or anything like that. Just special. I guess Jimmy Faust was special all right."

"And she was excited about meeting the special man that night?"

"Very excited. You'd have thought she was just a kid on her first date," Candy said. "Poor Penny. Maybe she'd be better dead than mixed up with them."

There was a silence. The blonde girl seemed to be seeing her friend in her mind. Cranston stood up. There

was nothing more he could learn from Candy. Except . . . He looked down at her.

"What do you know about CYPHER?"

The girl blinked. "Cypher? It's a name for code, isn't it? Or a name for a zero, a nothing."

"That's all you know?" He watched her very closely, the perception of The Shadow able to detect the faintest sign of surprise, or fear, or knowledge. He saw nothing. "The name means nothing to you?"

"No, Mr. Cranston, nothing."

"Well, thank you for your time."

Cranston left the way he had come in. Behind him the blonde girl finished her drink and rang for her maid. She stared out the window at the ocean as she waited for the maid to bring her another drink. She seemed lost, hopeless as she sat in all that elegant lushness, her magnificent body coiled in the chair, and stared out a picture window at nothing.

When he reached the gate, Cranston let himself out and pushed the gate shut behind him. He turned to walk to his car.

The shots cracked loud in the sunny afternoon.

Long splinters ripped from the tall redwood gate.

The splinters and the bullets whined angrily into the air of the silent beach street.

Cranston dove for cover.

Two more shots cracked out in quick succession, kicking dirt and concrete inches from Cranston's head.

The socialite rolled into the cover of his car.

In the shelter of the wheels, he quickly raised his head. With the powers of The Shadow he had immediately calculated the direction and range from the shots that had struck near him. Now his super eyesight searched the distant spot where he knew the shots had been fired. From the sound of the bullets he guessed that the would-be killer had used a high-powered sniper rifle with a telescopic sight. He saw what he wanted almost at once.

Five hundred yards up the long, straight road there was a sand hill above the beach. On that hill there were two small beach houses. Just at the base of the highest house he saw a faint movement. The glint of sun on metal, the

reflection of sun from the glass of a telescopic sight. Only the smallest of movements, but clear to the eyes of The Shadow.

Swiftly, silently, he moved from the shelter of his Jaguar into the shadows of the houses that lined the road on the right. Unseen, he worked his way forward along the high fences and through the bushes and gardens. His automatic was ready in his hand. With his training he was able to move almost in the open without ever being seen —a trick he had learned in the Orient. By using the natural cover of the houses and the gardens, and with his uncanny muscular control, Cranston reached the last house before the sand hill. He was sure that whoever had tried to kill him was still waiting for him to appear again from behind his car and attempt to get into the car for his escape.

At the base of the sandhill he looked up. Closer now, he saw the slim muzzle of the high-powered rifle protruding out from the thick bushes at the side of the highest house. He smiled to himself, the quick and triumphant smile of The Shadow. The assassin was doing exactly as he had expected—still waiting to get another shot when Cranston finally showed himself. The killer would be in for a surprise. Looking again at the hill, Cranston saw his route up and around the house to a point where he could look down and see his attacker clearly.

He moved with cautious speed along his mapped route up the hill. His automatic ready, he circled around and above the silent house. He crawled the last few yards through the thick growth on the side of the hill until he came out at the exact spot he had planned. He looked below and saw the assassin crouched at the corner of the house, the rifle with its long telescopic sight still pointed at the Jaguar five hundred yards down the long straight beach road. Even as he watched the would-be killer moved, peered toward the Jaguar. The killer had realized that too much time had passed, that, somehow, Cranston had escaped. The assassin stood up. Cranston stared.

The figure standing below was a woman. A woman wearing a long, shapeless Mu-Mu. There was a square shell case over her shoulder. There was something very

odd about her. She turned as he peered down, and he saw her face as clearly as if he had been standing beside her.

An old, wrinkled, wizened face.

The face of an old woman.

Her wizened face was framed with stringy grey hair. Her body was bent with age and arthritis. She shuffled as she began to walk.

Cranston stood up silently, and bent low to follow her down the hill.

Suddenly she turned, looked back.

Cranston crouched. She could not have seen him.

But she turned again and began to run as fast as her old legs could carry her. She had a long head start, and ran, hobbled, down the side of the hill to the road. Cranston raced down after her. He did not try to be silent now.

Somehow, incredibly, the old woman had *heard* him up there on the hill above her!

He pursued her down the hill and across the road. She hobbled across the road and into a walkway between two large beach bungalows. She was at least fifty yards ahead of him, but he was gaining rapidly. He reached the walkway between the houses and ran through. In the walkway he had smiled. He had her caught. There were no doors or gates in the walkway between the houses, nothing but the high side walls of the houses and some tall fencing. There was only one way out of the walkway, and that was onto the open beach. He ran out from between the houses and stood for a second in the bright afternoon sun to see which way she had run.

Where he stood he saw the ocean ahead, the open beach, the high terraces of the three or four nearest beach bungalows. There was no other way up from the beach. To his left he saw a group of young girls in bikini bathing suits, and some boys with them wearing the brief trunks of surfers. They were all playing some athletic game, their young bodies glowing in the sun.

To his right three couples, older than the bikini-clad teenagers to the left, lay sunning on the sand. They were older, but they were still young, and they all wore bathing suits that hid very little.

Directly in front of him a single girl sunned herself.

She lay on her back, her tanned skin glistening. Even as he watched she sat up on her blanket and took off her dark glasses. She was about twenty-five, quite pretty, with a small, snub nose, and her figure was more than shapely in her tight bathing suit. She began to oil her body and watched him.

There was no one else on the beach.

For some time Cranston stood there. It was, of course, impossible. The old woman could not have had time to escape, not even time to reach the water and swim away, if such an old lady could have done that. And yet he knew that the face he had seen had not been made up, not disguised. The eyes of The Shadow could not be deceived so easily by simple makeup. No, the old lady had been a real old lady, and the people on this beach were real young people. They did not wear enough clothes to hide an old body. It was impossible—and yet the old woman, and her rifle, had vanished.

It was the second time that someone had vanished with him close behind.

To be sure, Cranston walked close to all the people. The solitary woman who was oiling herself smiled at him, her eyes clearly suggesting that perhaps they could meet. He studied her closely. She was a young woman, and it was no disguise. None of the others seemed to be anything but what they were supposed to be. Cranston gave up. He turned back up the beach and walked through the walkway to his Jaguar. He was aware that something very strange was happening. There was more in all this than the Mafia.

At his car the fire-opal girasol began to hum in his hidden pocket. He passed it across the dashboard cigarette lighter. Stanley's voice came clear and urgent.

"Boss? They've called an evening session of the crime commission. Bailey called it. He wants everyone. It seems like Richards called in a while ago and has something big."

"How big, Stanley?" Cranston asked, his impassive face showing concern now.

"I don't know, Boss," Stanley's voice said from the min-

iature special radio. "But Commissioner Weston said something about calling in the State Guard!"

"Very well, Stanley. Did you learn anything about motorcycle clubs in the area?"

"No, Boss. There're about ten around, but none of them fit the bill. Burbank ran the descriptions through the computer file, result negative."

"All right, Stanley. Have Burbank run the name CYPHER through the computer file. I will be in the commission room."

Cranston passed the fire-opal girasol across the secret transmitter-receiver, and placed the ring back into its hidden pocket inside his clothes. Then he drove toward the courthouse in the deepening twilight of evening. His mind was working rapidly—all his investigations were leading him *away* from the Mafia, and yet Stanley said Richards had come up with something big, and Richards had been trailing the Mafia! For a moment Cranston's eyes flashed the fire of The Shadow. Something was not right.

12

CHAIRMAN WALTER BAILEY paced the floor of the plush and silent conference room. The other members of the crime commission, their assistants and secretaries, watched him. Their faces were serious. Bailey faced them.

"I want you all to listen to the report my assistant, Mr. Richards, has to make. Let me first point out that Richards is a trained investigator, and that both he and Mr. Cranston have been investigating the killing of Max Goleta. They both were led to one Mario Tucci, alias The Turk, a known Mafia chief from the Kansas City area. Mr. Cranston pursued his investigation along the lines of the dead Goleta, the woman who was at the motel, Penny

Bell, and her husband. You all know the results of that —the Bell woman seems to be missing, and her husband is in a schizophrenic state. Mr. Richards continued his surveillance of Tucci. I'll now let him tell you the results."

All eyes turned to Richards. The slender private detective leaned forward in the chair, his face serious. Cranston watched him from behind his hooded eyes. He wondered just where Harry Vincent was. The agent of The Shadow had not made any report of his own as yet. Richards nodded to Cranston.

"When Cranston left me, I went with his assistant, Harry Vincent, to pick up the trail of Tucci and his men on the other side of the lake. We had no difficulty, they left a trail a Boy Scout could follow. We trailed them back to the city. In the city they split up. Tucci and one other, a driver, went off alone. The rest went to a waterfront warehouse, so we know another of their hideouts.

"Harry Vincent decided to watch the warehouse, and I decided to trail The Turk. We both assumed that The Turk would return to the warehouse, but I was curious as to just where he was going." Richards looked slowly around the room, his pause like a cold chill in the commission room. "It was a lucky thing I was so curious—it may save the city!"

There was a silence in the elegant room high in the Santa Carla Courthouse. Richards looked at each of the commission members in turn. Then Samuel Bauermann snorted.

"I don't think any of us frighten easily, Mr. Richards," Bauermann said. "Suppose you just tell us what you found when you followed Mr. Tucci?"

Richards laughed. "Sorry, an old habit. You have to make a forceful presentation to most clients. I apologize, gentlemen. The facts, that is all you need."

Richards again paused, this time to light a cigarette. Walter Bailey bridled.

"For God's sake tell them, Allen!" Bailey said. "No more of this drama, please."

Richards smoked. "Well, I followed him right out of Santa Carla. That surprised me, but I kept after him. He

was in a hurry, and he never knew I was behind him. We drove all morning. Before I knew it, we were in the Sierras. He turned off the main highway near Lone Bear, a small ski resort in winter. I continued to follow him along a side dirt road, but I had to drop back or he would have seen me on such a deserted road.

"We seemed to go up quite a way, and about three-quarters of the way up the mountain I lost him. I didn't want to continue driving along that dirt road, too easy to spot me. So I left my car out of sight and went up on foot through the trees and brush. I was afraid they'd escape me, but I was in luck. The road was a dead end. The end was at the summit, so I backtracked until I found Tucci's car.

"It was parked off the road, just below the summit, behind a large mountain lodge. There was something very strange about the lodge. I realized that what was strange was that the building was set right up against a shoulder of the mountain, against a sheer rock face, and that the grounds were fenced in with barbed wire. Another thing that was strange was the number of cars there—at least twenty-five, I counted all I could see."

Slater broke in. "Twenty-five cars at a mountain lodge at this time of year? Are there lakes?"

Richards shook his head. "No, it's almost purely a ski resort."

Weston looked at Bauermann. "Appalaachia!"

"Yes, that's what I figured—*a top level meeting of the Mafia!* Well, to make the rest short, I managed to work my way in close enough to get a good look at what was going on. I saw at least ten top men I know in the Mafia. I heard what they were saying. They plan to move in their organizations from all over the country and make an all out attempt to take over Santa Carla!"

In the stunned silence that followed this ominous announcement, Bailey resumed his pacing the floor. The others seemed to be deep in thought as to the course to take now. Cranston watched Richards. The slender investigator did not know about the attempt on Cranston's life, or about the young woman in green and the old lady who seemed to have the power to vanish. Still, these

things could be the result of imported out of town experts of the Mafia. Cranston had to know more. If what Richards said were true, he would have to hurry.

"I did some investigating, too," Cranston said. "I'm trying to trace the Bell girl. I've succeeded far enough to tell you that someone doesn't want me to continue along the same lines."

Bailey stopped pacing. "The Bell girl? Oh, come on, Cranston, not now! We've got an invasion on our hands!"

"I say we better act and fast!" Morgan Slater said.

"It does seem about time," Bauermann agreed reluctantly.

Weston looked at Cranston. "What exactly do you have in mind, Lamont?"

Cranston looked at them all carefully. "I think that there is something more here than we've seen so far. I think we are missing something. I don't know what is going on yet, but I have more than a hunch that the Bell girl is the key."

Bailey swore. "Now, listen . . ."

For an instant Cranston's eyes flashed. "No, Mr. Bailey, you listen for a moment! Jimmy Faust was killed at the El Capitan motel by Mayor Rush, and there was a woman there who was never found. The Bell woman came to Lieutenant Moss a few days later and told her story. Since then, the Bell girl has vanished, Max Goleta has been killed. Lieutenant Moss has been killed, the Mafia are worried about something, and the husband, Henry Bell, has gone insane, and not from natural causes!"

Cranston's eyes flashed again. "No, there is something very strange going on, and the Bell girl is the key! What really happened at that motel that night? And what has happened since to Penny Bell?"

Richards leaned forward in his chair. "You say Henry Bell didn't go insane from natural causes, Cranston? How do you know that? What did send him insane?"

"All evidence points to some form of chemical inducement, Richards. Exactly how, I don't know, that's one of the strange aspects."

Morgan Slater sneered. "You're just guessing, Cranston! And we're not guessing about all those Mafia leaders

out at Lone Bear! I say we better get some action started!"

"Not guessing, Slater, deducing. And as for Henry Bell, I think Chairman Bailey knows that his insanity is induced as well as I do. He had been given an injection just before we found him, and all the evidence points to the fact that Henry Bell had no reason to go insane. Bell isn't the type. Am I right, Mr. Bailey?"

The pacing chairman stopped and looked at Cranston. Then, slowly, he nodded.

"All right, Cranston, yes. I suspected something about the state of Henry Bell," Bailey looked at the others. "I'm afraid Cranston is right, there *is* something more going on in all this. Nevertheless, we have to be ready to meet this Mafia challenge."

They all nodded agreement. Weston rubbed his chin, turned to Bailey.

"Then what do you suggest, Walter?"

"I suggest that Cranston continue his investigations, try to find the Bell woman, while we start the wheels moving to cope with this Mafia challenge."

Richards nodded. "Then I think I can help Cranston. I was going to bring it up next in my report." Richards turned to Cranston. "I think I know where the Bell girl is, Cranston. At that mountain lodge near Lone Bear. I'm not sure, but I saw a woman who seemed to be under guard. She was a long way off, but she fitted the description. I only got a quick look before they took her back inside."

"You saw her?" Cranston said. "Why would they be holding her?"

"Maybe because she does know what happened at the motel," Richards said. "You know, it occurred to me all along that perhaps the Mafia *wanted* Faust killed. Maybe they were out to frame the mayor for a killing, but it went wrong. The Bell girl could have been in on the frame, so they want her under wraps."

Cranston nodded. "It's possible."

Chairman Bailey continued his pacing. "Then I suggest that Cranston and Richards go back to that lodge at Lone Bear—and take some police with them. If I know the Mafia, the leaders won't be there by then, but

the girl might. Meanwhile, the commission will get to work on the bigger problem."

Bailey paused, looked at everyone. "Gentlemen, I say we ask the governor for the State Guard to be on standby alert, and that we immediately ask for State Police to augment the Santa Carla force."

"Second the motion," Morgan Slater said.

The crime commission members immediately plunged into discussion of exact ways and means, methods of operation, correct procedure. Allen Richards motioned to Cranston. The two investigators left the room and stood out in the corridor of the courthouse building. Richards was serious.

"We better get up to Lone Bear fast," Richards said. "It's out of the jurisdiction of the Santa Carla police, so we'll have to alert the local police."

Cranston agreed. "Right. Where's your car?"

"In the parking lot."

"Good, we'll . . ."

Very faint, so low it could not be heard by anyone but The Shadow, the fire-opal girasol hidden inside Cranston's clothes began to hum. Without pausing in his speech, without betraying the slightest hesitation or change, Cranston continued speaking.

". . . I'll follow you down in a few minutes. I have to make a telephone call to my secretary. We may be gone overnight, and I do have my business to take care of."

"All right, but make it fast," Richards said.

When the private investigator had gone, Cranston went into an empty office, passed his fire-opal girasol over his heavy signet ring. The voice of Margo spoke softly in the empty office.

"Lamont? A report just came in from Burbank. Harry Vincent reports that The Turk and his men have just left their warehouse hideout and gone to the mansion of the mayor."

"Turk?" Cranston said. "Is Harry sure?"

"Yes, Lamont," Margo's voice said urgently. "Turk returned only about an hour ago. He took all his men, and they went straight to Mayor Rush. Harry is observing!"

"Very well, Margo. Join Harry. I will be there soon."

Cranston passed the girasol ring over his signet ring, left the office, and went down in the elevator to join Allen Richards. The investigator was waiting in his car. Cranston leaned in.

"Something just came up, Richards. A personal matter. You go ahead to Lone Bear. I'll be along. Alert the police, and wait for me."

"Okay, but make it fast. No telling how long they'll keep the Bell girl there."

"I'll be right behind you."

"Okay. Meet me at the Red Deer Tavern, that's just before the side road."

Cranston nodded, and watched as Richards drove away. The moment Richards was out of sight, Cranston turned and ran for his Jaguar. Moments later he drove out of the parking lot into the night streets of the city. The figure at the wheel, bent forward with his eyes blazing in the night, was the black-shrouded shape of The Shadow.

The mansion of the mayor of Santa Carla was an old-fashioned three storey house set in the center of parklike grounds. The house was all gingerbread and cupolas, a Victorian mansion entirely out of place amid the palm trees and Asiatic pines of the city. The grounds themselves were thick with growth, and were shadowy behind a wrought iron fence.

Just outside the fence, hidden in a parked Rolls-Royce, a man and woman watched the mansion. It was Margo Lane and Harry Vincent. Both of them turned at the sound of a low, strong whisper in the night. The Shadow loomed near the car.

"Are they inside, Margo?"

"Yes, Chief," the dark-haired woman said.

"Have you heard anything?"

"No, nothing," Margo said.

"Very well. You and Harry remain here. Wait for my signal."

Margo nodded. Harry Vincent was about to speak, but he did not. There was nothing to speak to. The silent

car was again alone in the night. The Shadow had vanished.

A black shape on the mansion grounds, The Shadow glided among the trees and through the bushes. Swiftly, silently, and unseen, the black-garbed Avenger floated like some great bird of prey across the dark grounds up to the grotesque old mansion. There was a light in a downstairs window—the only light in the mansion. Crouched low beneath the window, The Shadow raised his head and peered inside, his fiery eyes glowing beneath the wide brim of the black slouch hat.

Inside the room there were six men. The room was the rear study of the mansion—the private study and office of the mayor. Four of the men were the young gunman-type The Shadow had seen in the large room at Lakeview Inn. The fifth man was the dapper Mr. Turk himself. The four young men, all wearing their tight topcoats despite the warmth of the night, were ranged in a square around the sixth man who sat in a chair. The Turk stood directly over this sixth man.

The sixth man was Mayor Rush himself.

A very frightened Mayor Rush.

The tall, distinguished mayor looked neither tall nor very distinguished as he cowered in the chair and looked up in fear at The Turk. As the piercing eyes of The Shadow watched, Turk reached down and slapped the mayor across the mouth.

"All right, who did you go to that motel to meet!" Turk hissed.

"Faust," Mayor Rush said, stammered. "You know that!"

"No," The Turk said. "You didn't go to meet Faust. Faust never went to that motel!"

"I saw Faust, and he tricd . . ."

Turk's hand flicked out again, slapped hard across the face of the mayor.

"Faust was with Maggiore that night! Maggiore said they were someplace with a woman. They were with this woman, and that was all Maggiore knew until he woke up right next to Hind's car!"

"He's a liar!" Mayor Rush cried.

Turk looked hard at the mayor. Then he motioned to his men. One of them, Jo-Jo, stepped out. Turk nodded at the mayor. The mayor stared fearfully at Jo-Jo. The young gunman stepped to the mayor. He held out his right hand and slipped on a thin leather glove. Jo-Jo fitted the fingers carefully, drawing each finger down smooth and tight. Then he clenched his fist and smoothed the glove over the fist. Then he smashed his fist into the face of the mayor.

Blood spurted from the mayor's nose.

"Faust wasn't in that motel. Who took him there?" Turk said.

Turk sat, now, on the edge of the mayor's own desk, his back turned to the mayor.

"Who really killed Faust and why?" Turk said, his slender fingers playing with the mayor's paper knife, his back still turned to the mayor.

"I killed him! He was trying to . . ." Mayor Rush said, the blood streaming from his broken nose.

Turk nodded.

Jo-Jo smashed his fist into the mayor's face. The mayor screamed. His mouth was a gash of blood. He moaned, dribbling blood.

"Why was Drake Hind killed?" Turk said, never looking at the bleeding mayor.

"I don't know!"

"Who did you really go to meet at that motel?"

"Faust!"

"Who killed the district attorney?"

"I don't know!"

"Where does the Bell girl fit in?"

"What Bell girl?"

"What is CYPHER?"

"Cy . . . ? I don't know what you're . . ."

Turk nodded. Jo-Jo's fist smashed into the mayor's face. A second time. The mayor groaned, blood spilling from his nose and mouth. Teeth fell to the floor. Carefully, Jo-Jo hit the mayor flush on the broken nose again. The mayor screamed.

"Okay," Turk said, his voice soft, his back still turned,

"one at a time. First, who did you go to meet at that motel?"

"I told you, I . . ." the mayor began thickly through his broken teeth.

Jo-Jo smashed his mouth. The mayor screamed.

"Who killed the DA?"

Silence. Jo-Jo hit the mayor's right eye. The mayor moaned.

"Who is CYPHER?"

The mayor shook his head, moaned.

"Why was Faust killed? Who set up Jimmy?" Turk said.

The mayor only shook his head, the blood bubbling from his mouth. Turk nodded. Jo-Jo drew his arm back and smashed the bloody face.

The mayor did not scream. He moaned once, and slumped in the chair. Where he sat on the desk, Turk turned to look at the unconscious mayor. Turk swore savagely, and motioned Jo-Jo back.

Outside the window The Shadow moved. Carefully and silently he slid the window up. He stood ready to climb through the window.

He heard the sound behind him. The Shadow tensed to turn, and then stopped. Turk had seen his black-shrouded form once before, perhaps he would learn more if Turk thought that he had a prisoner. The Shadow waited. Then he felt the pistol pressed into his back.

"Okay, mister, walk!" a harsh voice said.

The Shadow raised his hands and let the man walk him around the mansion and into the room where Turk was still staring down at the unconscious mayor.

13

HEARING the commotion at the door into the private study, The Turk turned. His eyes narrowed in his smooth,

dapper face when he saw the black-garbed figure marched in. Jo-Jo swore.

"It's him!"

"The one out at the inn," another of the Mafia men said.

"He's the one killed Aldo, and Marco, and . . . !"

"Sure! He got to be working with the mayor! I'll bet . . . !"

Turk commanded. "Shut up! All of you, clam up! Bring him over here!"

The gunman prodded The Shadow in the back. The black-shrouded Avenger allowed himself to be marched to stand in front of Turk. The dapper Mafia leader looked slowly up and down the strange black figure in front of him, stared at the hawk nose and fiery eyes that were all that was visible between the black cloak and the wide brimmed slouch hat. Turk looked at the glowing fire-opal girasol. Then he stared straight into the burning eyes of The Shadow.

"Who are you?" Turk asked, demanded, the long thin paper knife in his manicured hand.

The Shadow laughed his chilling laugh. Behind him he sensed the Mafia gunmen stir uneasily at the eerie sound of his laugh. His piercing eyes were fixed on The Turk.

"Men call me The Shadow, Mario Tucci!"

The Turk brushed his hand across his eyes. "The Shadow? No, I know who you are! CYPHER! Yeah, sure, it got to be! You're the one killed Jimmy Faust! The DA, too. You're going to tell me what the hell this is all about!"

The Shadow laughed again.

"What do you want to know, Mario Tucci?"

Already his power was reaching out. Behind him the Mafia men were quiet, lulled by a force they did not even suspect that seemed to place a gentle cloud on their minds. In front of The Shadow their leader, Mario Tucci was unaware of what was happening.

"I want to know just what this CYPHER is all about! A cloak! A disguise! You listen to me, Mister Shadow! I want to know why you killed Faust and the DA? How did you get to Faust? What did you do to Maggiore?"

"How do you know the mayor is not telling the truth, Mario Tucci?" The Shadow said softly.

"Listen . . . !" The Turk began, and brushed his eyes again, rubbed at his eyes. The Turk felt suddenly very strange. A soft cloud seemed to be invading his mind. He knew it, and yet he did not know it. His mind was clouding, his will draining away, and he knew it, and yet he did not really know that any of this was happening.

"That disguise! Yeah, the cloak, the hat, I . . ." Turk knew that he wanted to say something, wanted something done. He wanted The Shadow to remove his disguise. A moment ago he had known that that was what he wanted done, what he wanted to command, but now, suddenly, he could not remember what it was he wanted to command. He only remembered that he had wanted to say something to this strange black shape that seemed to grow larger and larger before him in the room.

"Tell me why you are sure the mayor is not telling the truth?" The Shadow intoned softly, but with an edge of command in his voice now.

"Yeah," Turk said, as if he suddenly remembered what he wanted this strange creature to tell him. "How did they get to Faust, you know? I mean, he was with Maggiore. They was both way across town with this woman, yeah."

"They were with a woman, of course," The Shadow said.

Turk nodded, his mind clouded now. The dapper Mafia leader thought, in his clouded mind, that he was still asking the questions, still interrogating the strange black figure that was all he could see in the room now. He spoke harshly, in a commanding voice, sure that he was asking the questions.

"Yeah. Faust didn't have a meet with the mayor. We weren't out to get the mayor or the DA. Why should we? You know? I mean, what for?"

"The mayor was planning to run you all out of the city," The Shadow said, his eyes watching The Turk carefully.

"So what? We don't operate that way no more, right? I mean, killing outsiders is too risky, it just stirs up the good citizens. Anyone can be bought, see?" Turk laughed.

"What about the five killings on the street?" The Shadow demanded.

"Yeah," Turk nodded. "That's what I mean? Who did that? I mean, why? Maybe to make trouble for us, eh?"

"Who do you think did it?"

"I figure some other gang, you know? Some outfit trying to take over. It figures. Maybe this CYPHER outfit. I mean, it makes sense. They knock off guys in their way. They set up the mayor and the DA. Sure, they kill Jimmy Faust, too. I figure some outfit is out to get both us and the city government, see?"

The Shadow studied the smiling face of the Mafia leader. The Turk, still convinced that he was in command of the situation, was smiling. The Shadow considered what The Turk had said. In a way it made sense, and yet. . . . No, the rival gang idea was not right. Why would a rival gang act so openly, stir up so much trouble that outside police were sure to come into the city? Why act in such a way that the crime commission, out to crush the Mafia, would be sure to crush the rival gang, too? The aroused citizens would be sure to crush both gangs! No, it made no sense that way. And yet, The Avenger believed that the Mafia had not done all of this.

"You had no reason to kill Drake Hind?"

"Hind? No. Hind was honest, but we could of gotten to the guys around him," The Turk said.

"Faust did not meet the mayor?"

"Never! The mayor we could buy, only someone bought him first."

"You don't know what happened at the El Capitan?" The Shadow demanded.

Turk blinked. A faint glimmer broke through the cloud that covered his mind. "Happened? At El Capitan? Yeah, that's what he got to tell us! He's going to tell us what really . . ."

The fire-opal girasol on the long finger of The Shadow suddenly began to glow and hum. The black-garbed Avenger raised his hand to his face, spoke into the signet ring.

"Report!"

The voice of Harry Vincent came low and clear. "Some-

thing going on out here, Chief! A couple of those motorcyclists went past a few minutes ago! Now I can hear sirens! The police are coming fast!"

The Shadow listened. The sirens were coming close. "All right, Harry. Come in here!"

The Shadow turned to the men who still stood there in the room as if nothing at all had happened. They all watched him and The Turk as if The Turk were still questioning him. The Turk himself was smiling. The mayor was still unconscious. The Shadow concentrated his powers, and all the Mafia men sat down quietly. The Turk remained smiling on the edge of the desk. Harry Vincent came into the room.

"They will remember nothing, Harry," The Shadow said quietly. "They will remain as they are until the police enter the house. When the police come, you will explain merely that you followed Turk and his men here, that they were questioning Mayor Rush about the night Faust was killed."

Harry nodded, his automatic out and ready. "I'll hold them. Did you learn much, Chief?"

"Enough, Harry," The Shadow said grimly, his eyes blazing a sudden light. "Enough to know that there is something very strange going on, and that the mayor is part of it!"

The police sirens were very close. The Shadow glided to the window. "I'll leave the Jaguar for you, Harry. Margo and I will take the Rolls."

"You're going somewhere now?"

"Yes, Harry. I think we are going for the answer," The Shadow said. "One way or the other, Harry, the Bell woman has always been the answer."

As the police cars screamed up outside the mansion, The Shadow went through the window and vanished in the darkness of the grounds. The police saw nothing, and moments later the Rolls-Royce was speeding away toward the main highway north and east out of the city. The man at the wheel of the big car was Lamont Cranston. Margo Lane sat beside her boss.

For some time they did not speak, Cranston concentrating his attention on the road out of the city. Then,

as the houses thinned and the city faded behind leaving the big car driving through a night of open country and scattered farms, Cranston began to talk. His quiet voice was low and steady.

"I never really doubted that there was more to that night at the El Capitan than was known, Margo. The question was only what and why."

"You think you can answer those questions now, Lamont?"

"Partly, Margo. I think, I'm almost certain, that Mayor Rush *was* in that motel with Penny Bell. And I think that the mayor and someone else killed Faust and the district attorney to cause the Mafia to get the blame."

The great black Rolls-Royce sped on through the night on the highway that stretched straight from the city to the dark shapes of the Coast Mountains. Then, as it reached the first green slopes of the foothills, the Rolls had to slow to negotiate the curves that rose in a series of switchbacks up the Coast Mountains toward the summit of San Miguel Pass. Cranston slowed, but still drove as fast as the dark and twisting road would allow. There were few houses here in the mountains. An occasional small cabin, and the mountain top ranch houses of the wealthy showed lights far up and away from the road that twisted through the rocky hills and heavy mountain growth.

"What I don't know yet, Margo, is what happened in the motel room, and who has a reason to cause the Mafia so much trouble."

Margo lighted a cigarette. "What do you mean, Lamont, about what happened in the motel room? That seems clear enough. Goleta heard the shots. The police found the body of Faust. His gun had been fired, there was a bullet in the wall. What else could have happened?"

Cranston was grim. "You forget the initial words of Goleta. He said 'she' had been killed. He said he had heard a woman scream. I think, Margo, that it was a woman who was killed in that motel room."

"You mean some other woman? The Bell woman just came forward to throw us off?"

"Perhaps. But if that were true, why is the Bell girl missing?"

"They thought we could shake her story," Margo said.

Cranston nodded. "That could be. But there's still something very odd, very sinister about all of it. If it were a woman who was killed and not Faust, then where was Faust killed and how did his body get into the cabin? For that matter, Margo, how did the body of the woman get out of the motel cabin?"

Swinging smoothly down, the summit of San Miguel Pass behind them, the black Rolls-Royce came out of the Coast Mountains and moved swiftly across the flat country of the inland valley. Here the night was hotter, the land drier and flatter, and the great ranches stretched for miles. The palm trees were gone, and the long valleys looked more like their brother valleys of the inland states farther east. The small towns were flat and dusty, and the few larger cities the Rolls sped through were equally flat and dusty. The only difference between the cities and the towns being size. The inland valley cities were set like a series of shoe boxes on top of the land, all squares and angles, with no natural reason for existence. No harbors, no rivers, no natural contours of land to gather people—only flat, square places where people could stop on the highway to eat or sleep. Cranston did not slow down more than the law required as the Rolls sped through these cities.

"There was very little time. How did someone find, kill, and get Faust to that motel? Even if they found him, took him to the motel, and then killed him, there is little time involved."

"They couldn't, Lamont," Margo said simply.

Cranston nodded. "No, they couldn't, unless they were ready! One thing, Margo, has struck me all along. There had been five killings in the streets of Santa Carla. The Turk charges that these were not Mafia. Whatever they were, they were very neat and very careful—no clues. Then, suddenly, Mayor Rush is caught red-handed with a body in a cheap motel. A man who had no reason to lie said a woman had been killed, but the police found a

man. *And who that man was made the mayor's killing seem all right!*"

Margo seemed to be watching the faint shadow of the high mountains just beginning to be visible ahead. "You mean, Lamont, that if Mayor Rush had been found with any other dead man except a Mafia leader, the killing might not have been so easily explained or readily excused?"

"I mean exactly that. On top of that, coupled with the murder of Drake Hind, it brought in the crime commission. What if Mayor Rush had killed some lady he was spending the evening with?"

Margo laughed. "End of mayor, and probably end of crime war for this season."

"Right," Lamont said. "No, that Rush killed Jimmy Faust was most convenient for Rush. And why was Drake Hind killed? Where was he going in such a hurry at that hour? The Mafia swear they set no trap. So who did?"

"CYPHER?" Margo said.

They came around a long curve in the highway and suddenly the mountains towered ahead—the Sierras. They loomed in the night like some great wall across the flat land. The tall, jagged peaks were a blacker black than the sky, and already a faint chill of wind seemed to blow down from them across the flat and hot valleys. As the black Rolls-Royce sped on, the chill deepened, the lights of houses thinned out more and more, and the great Sierra Del Norte towered higher and higher.

"CYPHER," Cranston said. "Margo, that night in the El Capitan has all the smell of an *accident*. Something went wrong, and there had to be a quick cover up. The shots were heard, a scream was heard—a woman's scream. Someone had to move fast. And not the mayor. I think it was CYPHER. I think that whoever, or whatever, CYPHER is, it moved fast and expert that night. I think we are up against some very sinister, and very efficient group."

"A group we don't know?"

"Burbank reported nothing in our files, not a hint," Cranston said grimly.

"And you think they were able to substitute Faust for a dead woman?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why, Lamont? What do they gain? All they've done is cause the whole city to get up in arms *against* crime."

"I know, Margo. I wonder if that isn't exactly what they wanted to do!"

"But why!" Margo said, puzzled.

"That I don't know yet."

"And Drake Hind," Margo said. "If that night started as some kind of mistake, why kill Hind? Why purposely lure him out of his house and kill him?"

"When we know that, Margo, we'll have our answers," Cranston said. "Or when we have our answers as to exactly what happened in the El Capitan, we'll know why Hind was killed."

"You think Lieutenant Moss was on the same track?"

"Yes, Margo. He was not satisfied, not even with the story of the Bell girl. And that note I found. I'm sure now what it meant. He was wondering how the woman, or her body, got out of that cabin. Personally, I think those black-jacketed motorcyclists have something very much to do with it."

The giant escarpment of the Sierra Del Norte towered directly in front of the black Rolls now; the road beginning its ascent. Tall trees rose thickly on both sides of the curving highway, and mountain streams leaped white in the night. The cold, clean air of the mountains seemed to flow over everything.

"You think we'll find the answers here in the Sierras?"

"Yes, Margo," Cranston said. "I think the Mafia meeting Richards reported must be to discuss a situation they don't understand. The Bell girl is still the key. She may not even *know* what she knows. But I think if I can find her, talk to her, then we'll know. Or The Shadow will know!"

For a moment Cranston's eyes flashed the fire of The Shadow.

"Do you think Richards and the others are aware of what is going on?"

"I'm not sure. Richards is pretty smart, he's probably at

least aware that something isn't quite the way it seems. As for the others, I don't know, Margo. This CYPHER is a careful group, if it isn't in our files, and a very good job has been done. You see, Margo, the real problem is what do they gain? Why are they doing all this? Until we know that, it is going to be hard to convince anyone that there is anything unusual going on. They do not know all that The Shadow knows."

After that the road became winding and dangerous, and Cranston watched the road. It climbed steadily up through the dark trees, bordered by deep gulleys where the white streams jumped downhill, and wound around the dark walls of the mountains themselves that were too close for the summits to be seen. It was a shutin world—all trees, the faint white of the highway, the deep gulleys right and left, the close mountains, an occasional house or mountain cabin with single lighted windows.

A few miles before Lone Bear, on a particularly lonely stretch of the highway at the base of a mountain higher than its neighbors, visible now that they were so high, Margo pointed to the right. On a rustic log building was the sign: Red Deer Bar. There were four cars parked in front. Cranston recognized one of them as Allen Richards' car. He eased the Rolls-Royce to a stop in front of the rustic tavern. He and Margo got out and started for the door.

Just as they reached the door, Cranston stopped. His keen ears heard the sound on the road. He turned, and just as he did, five motorcycles roared around the bend on the highway, raced past the Red Deer, and vanished along the road toward Lone Bear.

They had all worn black leather jackets.

In the now silent night, Cranston and Margo stared in the direction the cyclists had gone. They could still hear the motors fading into the night.

14

THEY SAW Allen Richards as they came in the door. The slender investigator was seated in a rear booth alone. He stood up and smiled when he saw Cranston and Margo.

"Miss Lane! Well, this is a pleasant surprise," Richards said. Then the investigator frowned. "But I'm not sure you should be here. This could be dangerous, Cranston."

"Margo has worked with me before, Richards," Cranston said. "You needn't worry about her."

Richards nodded. "Good. Then, let's get started. What kept you?"

As they went out to their cars, Cranston explained what had happened at the mayor's mansion. Richards listened closely. When Cranston finished, the slender private detective looked worried.

"The mayor? You're sure?"

"The Mafia are sure he knows more than he told," Cranston said.

"The police have them?"

"Yes."

Richards nodded. "Good. The commission will be talking to them by now. I think this makes it all the more important we try to find the Bell girl."

"Are the Lone Bear police ready?" Cranston asked.

"Yes. They're just waiting for my call. I'll go and call them now, and we'll meet them at the lodge up on the mountain. I'd like to be there first, just in case. They may try to run for it when they see or hear the police. They can't get away, the one road is the only way out. But they might decide to get rid of the girl. We should be there in case."

Cranston agreed. "Good. Make your call, then."

Richards went back into the Red Deer. While the investigator was gone, Cranston whispered quickly to Mar-

go. The efficient secretary agent listened carefully, nodding as her boss talked.

"Richards is right, they might try to kill the girl if they suspect. It may be a job for The Shadow, Margo. Be prepared. I will cloud Richards' mind if I have to, but then I will have to revive him because we will need him. You will have to make some explanation of my absence."

"Of course, Lamont," Margo said, nodded.

Richards came back moments later, and the three entered their cars. Richards led the way. Cranston drove the black Rolls-Royce closely behind the car of the slender agent. They did not go far along the highway in the night before Richards signaled a left turn, and both cars left the highway and plunged into a side road. It was a narrow dirt road, and it led sharply upward into the dark trees that grew tall on all sides.

The side road climbed at a steep angle, with many tortuous climbing curves up and around the towering mountain. The trees high all around shut out the sky, but an unseen moon had risen and cast a pale blue-silver light through the tall trees of the mountainside. From time to time the road dipped into a gulley, but the constant direction was steadily upward. Until the trees began to thin, and long, wide saucerlike fields opened up on either side of the road. These broad fields reached in long curves upward to where the rocks of the mountain summits began, to where there were no more trees or fields but only the jagged stone. In the moonlit night the open fields, and the dark rocks were ghostly as the Rolls-Royce followed Richards' car. They were still some distance from the summit when Richards finally stopped.

The slender investigator parked his car in the shadows of a rocky spur. He stepped out and waved Cranston to park in the same shadow. Both cars were hidden from all but the closest scrutiny. The three stood inside the shadows, and Richards pointed up the road.

"The lodge is just about a half a mile up the road around that curve. It's set right against the rock of the base of the summit. It's fenced, as I said, but I think we can get to it by going *over* the mountain. That's why I

stopped here. If we start climbing here, I think we should come down right behind and above the lodge."

"Good," Cranston said.

"Shouldn't we wait for the local police?" Margo said.

Richards looked up the mountain. "It might be a good idea, only . . ."

"Only it will take us some time to get over the mountain, and we should be in position to move in when the police arrive outside," Cranston said.

"It is risky," Richards said, "they may have guards, in fact they almost certainly will have someone watching this route."

"We can elude guards if careful," Cranston said.

"Then I think we should go now, not wait," Richards said.

Cranston nodded. "Yes, I agree. And I think we better change our routine, Margo."

The dark-haired woman watched her chief. She knew that behind all that Cranston said was his real plan—to enter the Mafia headquarters alone as The Shadow. That was the only sure and safe way to find Penny Bell. The Shadow could get in unseen and unheard.

"I think you better stay here, Margo," Cranston went on. "To explain our plan to the police. Give us about . . ." He looked at Richards.

"Say half an hour, that should do it," Richards said. "We should be right behind the lodge by then."

"Half an hour then, Margo. After that, tell the police to move in as quietly as possible until they are right at the gate," Cranston went on. "Wait ten minutes there. If you hear my signal, Margo, then move in fast. If you don't hear my signal after ten minutes, move in anyway."

"Right, Lamont. You, er, can handle it all without me?" Margo said.

Cranston smiled. "Yes, I think so."

Richards also smiled. "We can handle it, Miss Lane."

Margo nodded. Without another word, the two men checked their weapons and moved off in the night. Margo watched them go, the small, slender figure of Richards leading the way up the rocky side of the mountain toward the summit above. The taller, heavier figure of Cranston

followed. The two men moved swiftly and silently, both men obviously trained and physically conditioned to this kind of work. They picked their way upward over the rocks with amazing speed and agility. Margo, standing beside the cars in the now silent night of blue-white moonlight, watched them until they vanished among the rocks in the shifting shadows. Then she turned and stood looking back down the road and listening for the approach of the police. She did not have long to wait before she heard the sound of motors approaching carefully up the road.

Up on the mountain, Richards and Cranston climbed quickly to the summit. Cranston watched Richards with appreciation. The small man was far stronger than he looked. Cranston smiled to himself. He guessed that more than one enemy had been startled by the physical prowess of the slender investigator. Richards never paused once until they had reached the top. There he waited for Cranston. He nodded silently down the descending slope. Cranston peered through the dark with his night vision. He saw, clearly, the upper roof of the lodge protruding above the rocks far below. The rest of the lodge, set up against the mountain, was hidden. Cranston did not let Richards know that he could see so well, but allowed the investigator to hand him the infrared binoculars Richards carried. Cranston pretended to need these.

"Yes, I see. We should be able to get to the roof and down that way," Cranston said.

"That was my idea," Richards said. The investigator peered through the glasses, studied the entire down slope. "I don't see any guards."

Cranston, with his night sight, saw no guards either.

"Very careless, or very confident," Richards said. "I've never seen the Mafia make that mistake before."

"Or gone," Cranston said.

"Let's hope not," Richards said grimly.

The two men began their descent. They moved more slowly on the downward climb, partly because it was necessary on the steep and rocky slope, and partly because each step brought them closer to the silent lodge. Cranston watched ahead and listened with his super hearing.

He could see nothing moving. He heard not the faintest sound. His hooded eyes were puzzled and wary. If they were there, why were they so quiet? A sixth sense, the sixth sense of The Shadow, sounded a faint warning in his mind. There was something very strange here. He could not put his finger on it. All seemed to be in order. Just before they began their descent he had heard, faintly behind them where they had left Margo, the sound of motors that indicated the arrival of the local police. Richards was moving expertly and cautiously down the mountain. Perhaps it was simply the lack of a guard. Before Cranston could consider further, Richards held up his hand for caution and silence. Cranston caught up to the investigator. Richards had reached a spot from where the grounds of the lodge were visible. Richards pointed.

A group of men walked across the open grounds of the lodge. Well-dressed men moving from the lodge toward a row of black cars. Even as Richards and Cranston watched, two of the men checked pistols and returned the guns to shoulder holsters. At the side of the lodge other well-dressed men were gathered in groups, talking.

"Darn!" Richards hissed in the dark, "they're leaving!"

"They'll run directly into the police. We . . ." Cranston began to say.

Richards gripped his arm. "Look!"

Cranston looked to where Richards pointed. In front of an outbuilding of the lodge two men stood with a woman. The woman seemed peculiar. Richards looked through his infrared glasses. Cranston did not need glasses. He could see the woman clearly. The peculiar thing about her was that her hands were tied behind her, and she was Penny Bell! There was little time. Cranston had to move—The Shadow had to move! Richards would only be in the way now.

"Stay here, Richards!" Cranston commanded in the harsh tones of The Shadow.

There was no time to change into the secret black garb, and he could not in front of Richards anyway. First he would reach the ground below, and then he would become The Shadow. After his sharp order to Richards, Cranston moved rapidly down to the edge of the moun-

tain above the lodge. The distance was great, but not too great for The Shadow. He gathered his muscles and leaped from the rocks to the roof of the lodge.

Like a great cat he landed on the roof with a light thump, and was across the roof and at the dark edge in seconds. Below, three stories down, the men were moving toward their cars. The Bell girl was gone now, back into the outbuilding, which gave him a little time. He circled the roof to the side away from the parked cars and went over the edge and down, holding to the cracks and crevices of the wooden building with his steel-like fingers. He reached the ground in a dark corner next to the building. Swiftly he moved around the building in the dark to where he could observe the outbuilding. It was across some fifty yards of open space. Cranston carefully checked all around him. Where he crouched against the building there was the mountain wall directly to his left, open space on all other sides.

It was time for The Shadow to enter the situation.

Cranston's eyes flashed, and he reached to take the black garb from its secret pockets within his clothes.

The floodlights blazed into his eyes.

Floodlights all around him.

He blinked his hooded eyes, stood against the wall like a moth pinioned in a blaze of light.

Any other man would have been blinded by the floodlights, but Cranston, his eyes narrowed against the glare, could see beyond the lights.

He saw all the well-dressed Mafia men ranged in a circle behind the lights with weapons trained directly on him. He saw the girl who had looked like Penny Bell—but, he saw now, was not Penny Bell. The Mafia men moved in toward him, ringing him.

There was a sound of motors—loud motors. From his right five men on motorcycles appeared. They all wore black leather jackets. They blocked any escape that way.

Cranston watched them. They were all around him, alert, armed, and the floodlights left him no cover at all. He was caught—without the power of The Shadow to cloud their minds.

There was no way out.

He slowly raised his hands.

They all moved in, and, without a word, prodded him toward the lodge entrance. He went up the steps, feigning considerable fear, but his mind actually on Richards up on the cliff, and Margo with the police on the road. There should be considerable action before more than a few minutes had passed. Cranston was ready for anything that might happen, and he only hoped that Richards had the sense to wait for Margo and the police.

Inside the lodge, where he had expected to find more of the Mafia leaders, Cranston was startled to find the place empty, deserted. The chairs were all covered with dust covers. There was no sign of anyone having lived here for months. There seemed to be no staff and no one at the desk. The only people in the large and rustic lobby were those who had brought Cranston in. Slowly, he looked at all their faces—the young, black-jacketed cyclists, one with a beard; the woman who looked like the Bell girl but, close now, was really not at all like the Bell girl but had been made up to resemble her; the ten Mafia men in their expensive suits.

Then he knew that it was a trap.

The Mafia men were not Mafia at all. Two were Chinese! One was a Negro. At least two were big and blond. One seemed to be an Arab of some kind! They all stood alert and careful—as trained soldiers.

The woman who looked like the Bell girl, in an obvious disguise, was also armed and watchful.

The young men in the black leather jackets showed no surprise at all that Cranston was there.

A trap, and they were all waiting. They had marched him into the lodge, and now they just stood there and waited. Cranston had a sudden sickening suspicion of what they were waiting for, of the answer to a great many of the questions in the whole affair.

"Lamont!"

He whirled. Margo stood just inside another entrance into the lobby. Three young men in black leather jackets stood behind her with Russian submachine guns trained on her back. The pretty, dark-haired girl had an expression of shock on her face. Cranston could guess why.

"There were no police, Margo?" Cranston said quietly.

"*They* came," Margo said, nodding sharply at the young men behind her in the black leather jackets. "I heard motors, and they came on their motorcycles! I had no chance. They *knew* I was there!"

"Yes," Cranston said. "They knew. A trap all along. I've been a fool, Margo. It was there in front of my nose. He was very anxious to incriminate the Mafia. He also conveniently prevented us from talking to The Turk and his men at the Lakeview Inn."

Margo blinked. "Richards?"

"Yes, Mr. Allen Richards, although I doubt if that is his real name. And I would say, Margo, that we have found not the Mafia, but CYPHER!"

There was a sense of movement in the large lobby of the rustic mountain lodge, a menacing movement. All the silent people who had them covered seemed to move a step closer. Cranston looked at them, and then raised his voice.

"Would you say I had found CYPHER, Mr. Richards?"

There was a sighing sound like a faint hiss of air. A door opened in the rear wall of the rustic lobby. Allen Richards stepped out through the opening. The small, slender private detective was smiling. He bowed toward Cranston. The bow was a fluid, sweeping motion. A very strange motion, somehow wrong for the man. He stepped toward Cranston, still smiling, and stopped.

"Yes, Mr. Cranston, I would say you have indeed found CYPHER."

15

MARGO AND CRANSTON both stared at the slender man. There was something strange about his voice, a new quality, a lightness not there before.

"Or, to be more precise," Richards said, "CYPHER has

found you. You were becoming most annoying. I really don't think anyone else would have thought any more about the Bell girl after her appearance at police headquarters if you hadn't come along. Very regrettable. Unfortunately for me, I missed you at Candy Smith's bungalow. Still, all is well now, eh?"

Cranston watched him. "You? At Candy Smith's bungalow?"

Richards smiled, laughed aloud—a loud, pealing, very female laugh. The slender investigator seemed to gather himself together, concentrate, eyes half-closed. Then, before all their eyes, he *changed*. His flesh and skin seemed to flow and change. He swept his arms in a wide circle and a voluminous mu-mu appeared.

An instant later Richards was gone and in his place there stood a wizened old lady in a flowing mu-mu.

Cranston watched from under his hooded eyes.

The man, the old woman, laughed almost an insane laugh. He stood there, Richards, as the wizened old lady who had shot at Cranston.

"So, then . . ." Cranston began.

The old lady cackled a wild laugh—and changed again. She flung away the mu-mu, vanished for a moment behind the silent lodge desk, and came out. Margo gasped.

A beautiful woman stood there in a bathing suit—the woman Cranston had seen on the beach where the old lady had vanished. Not makeup, *the woman herself*, the face actually changed by the flow and control of powerful muscles.

The woman, Richards, roared with laughter.

Penny Bell stood there. The face of Penny Bell to every detail. Not makeup but a real face. Penny Bell in the bathing suit of the woman on the beach.

Then Allen Richards' face returned—the face of the slender man on the body of the woman on the beach!!

Cranston, his hooded eyes impassive, watched this display of strange power.

Quickly, now, Richards, or whoever he really was, became a young motorcyclist; a middle-aged woman; an old man—all on the body of a voluptuous female. Faces Cranston had not seen, and some he had—the motorcy-

clist on the street the night the woman in green had vanished after killing Lieutenant Moss.

As the man went through his changes, laughing half-insane all the time, Cranston was aware of two facts. Richards was not a man but a woman—the face could be changed by muscles, the form and shape of the body, but the body of a man could not become the body of a woman in a bathing suit! No, Richards was a woman.

A woman who had powers like the powers of The Shadow himself!

Now he remembered the way the old lady had heard him there on the hill, the way the woman in green had heard him and seen him when no one else could have. He was now facing someone with powers of a high order. He remembered the way the woman in green had leaped two stories to a stone alley and the training and skill Richards had shown.

Suddenly, the show stopped. Richards turned and vanished again behind the desk of the lodge. When he stepped out he was no longer either Richards or the woman in the bathing suit. He was a tall, slender woman magnificently curved in a tight green dress. Long dark hair and a perfect nose. Full lips and a beauty contest face. But the beautiful body was coiled and tense like some dangerous predator, and the eyes were the eyes of a cold, hard killer. Powerful eyes that burned with a fire like that of The Shadow himself.

It was the woman who had killed Lieutenant Moss—the real face of Richards! And the face of CYPHER!

"Did you enjoy the show, Mr. Cranston? Miss Lane?" the woman said, smiled.

"Is this your real face and figure, Miss . . ." Cranston said.

The woman shrugged her beautiful shoulders. "Perhaps it is, and perhaps not. Let us say it is the face and figure you will see as me. As for my name, what does it matter? Call me Richards, it is as good as any name. It is enough for you to know that I am CYPHER! Here, I am CYPHER. What CYPHER is does not matter to you. You will not live long enough to care. You have seen my powers!"

"Tricks, yes," Cranston said.

The woman smiled. "Tricks? Yes, partly, and partly not, Mr. Cranston. I learned many powers in the Orient. True powers, Mr. Cranston. Powers of the mind, the body, the will, that you would not believe! There was a great Master, Chen T'a Tze. He died many years ago, and most of his secret powers died with him. But not all, not quite all—and one of his pupils taught me! I tell you this so that you will know it is useless to try to fight me!"

"Because you can change your face?" Cranston said, smiled.

"No, Mr. Cranston," the woman said, "because I can control your minds!"

The woman's eyes blazed, burned, and stared straight at Margo. For an instant Cranston felt suddenly as cold as ice. Was it possible? Had Chen T'a Tze given his ultimate power to some other man as well as The Shadow? Cranston looked at Margo. The dark-haired girl had gone rigid, her eyes blank. Then Margo seemed to relax, become limp, and stand there with her blank eyes staring at nothing.

The woman laughed. "She is now completely under my control, Mr. Cranston. And now we end this farce, we have a long way to go."

The woman's eyes blazed again and she stared straight into the eyes of Cranston. Cranston stood and his hooded eyes opened and burned in return. Within a moment he smiled deep inside, although his impassive face showed nothing. The power of the woman's mind was that of a remarkable hypnotist, no more. A very powerful hypnotist, but only that. She was no match for The Shadow.

Without his black garb and the fire-opal girasol he could not cloud her mind and defeat her, but he had no difficulty in resisting her hypnotic gifts. She could do nothing against his mind. But that she did not know.

Where he stood, Cranston became rigid, and then limp. His eyes went blank. His breathing became slow and shallow. He swayed like a man under full hypnosis. He was in a mild self-hypnotic trace the woman could never suspect was not the result of her work. He saw her smile

and turn to her subordinates. She was unaware that Cranston could see and understand her every move.

She snapped out her orders in a strange language Cranston recognized at once—an obscure Manchurian dialect.

The door opened in the rear wall, and Margo and Cranston were led out. The door closed behind, and Cranston saw that they were in a vast cavern hollowed out of the center of the mountain. They were marched for a long time until they came to another large cavern. There was a helicopter. They were hustled into it, the mountain seemed to open above, and they flew out and away across the peaks of the Sierra Del Norte.

Cranston saw that the woman was at the controls, and that they were headed south.

The helicopter came down less than two miles away at a small airport hidden in a deep valley—a box valley with walls on all sides. Cranston saw that the airport was not visible from the sky at all. A totally hidden airport—large enough to be used by twin-engined DC-3 aircraft, or by small jets!

The instant the helicopter touched down, Cranston and Margo, supposedly totally hypnotized, were hustled from the copter into a small square building. Cranston saw cells, and desks, and a large cabinetlike object with drawers. Cranston recognized this cabinet immediately. It was so large it reached from floor to ceiling—the kind of cabinet used by morgues and undertakers to store bodies!

He had time to see no more before they were commanded to walk outside and enter a single engined jet—a converted fighter plane that now had four seats. Margo and Cranston were placed in the two center seats. The woman, Richards, took the controls, and a guard took the rear seat. The jet roared off and swept high into the sky.

Again they flew south.

It was dawn when the powerful converted fighter jet swooped down over a barren desert. Cranston had seen no houses, no sign of life, since the light had returned.

He guessed that they were somewhere in the arid and empty land of Utah, New Mexico, or Nevada.

Where they landed there was nothing at all. A vast stretch of desert, cactus, and silence.

The jet came to a halt slowly. The woman did not get out. Then there was a faint whirring and a movement, and the jet sank into the earth. An elevator, and the camouflaged roof closed over them.

Cranston and Margo were commanded to get out. They were marched a long way through a dim tunnel until they emerged in a brightly lighted underground room. In the room many men worked over crates and boxes. There were vast vats and great slabs of stone. Again there was a refrigerator cabinet for bodies, and there were more cells.

Even as Cranston stood and watched what he was not supposedly able to see, he saw a dead body laid into a wooden frame. A thick liquid was poured over the body. Moments later a large overhead crane removed what looked like nothing but a slab of stone! The slab was crated and labeled for shipment and loaded onto a truck with many other crated slabs of stone.

And all at once Cranston knew what he was witnessing —what had happened to Penny Bell! What had happened to many other bodies—the bodies of men who were missing, whose bodies had never been found! Now he knew that Penny Bell was dead, had indeed been killed there in the room at the El Capitan. Her body had been gotten away from the motel by CYPHER, and had been taken on this route to end, undoubtedly, somewhere far out of the country where it could never be found! The Penny Bell who had walked into the police station had been Richards in the shape of Penny Bell!

The only question now was—why? Why had Penny Bell been killed, by whom, and why was CYPHER involved? The question still remained who or what was CYPHER?

The questions would not be answered here—they would not be answered until they all reached their destination, wherever that was to be.

It was noon, a bright and burning sun over the desert, when the truck loaded with slabs of crated stone came

out into the sun from the hidden factory below. The truck drove across the desert for a mile until it reached a highway and turned—south again. In the truck cabin Margo and Cranston lay silent in a false bunk-compartment behind the driver's seat where the Richards woman sat beside the driver and an armed guard.

They reached the Mexican border at some hour after dark.

But they did not try to pass through. Instead, the truck turned off the highway a mile short of the border cross point, and drove without lights along a side road. Cranston was aware that the truck was angling closer to the border as it drove. It stopped before they reached the border. The woman commanded them out. Men swarmed silently around the truck, unloading it. They unloaded only two of the crates, and the truck drove off and vanished.

The crates were taken to a small shack. The woman followed Cranston and Margo into the shack. Inside, the shack was no more than a shabby single room—until the entire floor, concrete slab and all, revolved and revealed a staircase. The staircase led down to a dirt tunnel. The tunnel led to a hidden elevator. The elevator went down a long way before it finally stopped.

Cranston and Margo were led out into another tunnel, but a very different tunnel. This tunnel was small but lined with concrete and well lighted. It led into still another room of cells and the large refrigerated cabinet. Men worked here, but this time the woman did not pause or wait. She commanded Margo and Cranston to enter a small open car set on rails. The rails led into a dark tunnel. The woman and a guard also got into the car. The car moved out along the rails and plunged into the darkness of the tunnel.

It seemed that they were in the dark for hours. But Cranston estimated that it was no longer than half an hour, the tiny railroad car covering about a mile. They emerged in another lighted room and were hustled through and into another elevator. They rode up, came out into a dirt tunnel and then out into a kind of cave.

Finally they found themselves standing in the dark night in a deserted field. A long, black car waited. The license plates were Mexican.

The car drove away.

Less than half an hour later they reached a small airport. A twin-engined DC-3 was already revved up and waiting. Moments later they were once again in the air—headed still south, and a few degrees west.

They flew for a long time in the dark night until a faint dawn light appeared behind them and, far below, Cranston saw the coastline where a blue sea broke in a white surf on the land.

When the DC-3 came down this time, Cranston sensed that they were at the end of their journey—at the end of CYPHER'S "underground railway" for the removal of bodies and/or captives. He guessed, grimly, that many an unsolved murder and disappearance would be solved if the police could inspect the operations of the unknown organization.

The DC-3 came down in the dawn light in a long valley set deep in towering mountains but not far from the coast. From the air the valley seemed to be a green and jungle-covered valley with a wide and shallow river in the center—a dried-up river at this season. Close up, as they landed, the river was revealed to be a smooth and expertly camouflaged landing strip. The thick green jungle was, in part, no more than a covering over a series of low, flat buildings set against the side of a mountain. The DC-3 landed and taxied beneath the cover, now totally hidden from the air or anywhere else but the valley floor itself.

The woman in green ordered Cranston and Margo out and into a building. Inside the building they were marched to separate cells and locked in. The woman in green stood outside the cells and smiled at Cranston and Margo where they stood inside the locked cells.

"Well, here we are at last," the woman, Richards, said. "Sit!"

Margo and Cranston sat on the cell bunks.

"Good. You can rest while I report, and the area leader

decides just what we will do to you. Don't worry," she laughed.

She turned and walked to a small microphone set in the wall of the building guardroom. She pressed a button and spoke into the microphone. "Group leader Cypher 12 reports return with two walking prisoners."

A low, hard voice answered. "Who are the prisoners?"

"Lamont Cranston and his secretary Margo Lane. They were in our way on the Santa Carla account."

"Include them in your presentation. You are ready to make your presentation on the progress of the Santa Carla account, Group Leader 12?"

"Yes, A.L."

"Come to my office in ten minutes."

The microphone went silent.

The Richards woman, group leader Cypher 12, turned and walked toward the door of the building. She did not see the sudden movement behind her.

In the cell where Lamont Cranston had been sitting so quietly on the bunk, hypnotized, the bunk was empty now. The cell door silently opened and closed. The great black figure of The Shadow slid out into the main guardroom.

The woman walked to the door and out without being aware that behind her, in the guardroom, the two guards lay asleep at their desks. She neither saw nor heard the black shrouded shape, the burning eyes that followed her movements from beneath the brim of a wide slouch hat.

16

IN THE MOUNTAIN dawn it was dim and shadowy beneath the cover that hid the flat buildings from all observation. The woman in green, group leader 12, Cypher Command, United States, walked quickly to her private quarters in the officer's building. The two guards who saluted her

never saw the black shape that entered the building moments later.

In her quarters she showered and changed into her black CYPHER uniform—slim and efficient coveralls with the round white circle that was the badge of CYPHER, and her rank prominent on the shoulders. From the shadows of her small room two fiery eyes observed her every move. It was clear that she was, indeed, a woman; that she was much older than she seemed, the remarkable powers of her mind and body able to shape her face into any face she wanted; and that she had once been a soldier—the secret mark of the *Irgun Ha'n Zvi* on her left arm, the feared Israeli killer-commando unit. The Shadow watched her grimly—CYPHER had many faces, the faces of many nations.

Dressed, the woman, group leader 12, left her quarters and recrossed the dim and shadowy area hidden beneath its camouflage deep in the mountains of Mexico. Gliding behind her like no more than a shifting of the shadows, The Shadow guessed that CYPHER had little to fear from accidental discovery, and guessed that the organization was well-defended by radar and more sophisticated alarm systems. Yet they took no chances—a man would have to literally stumble over this place before he saw it.

The Richards woman reached what appeared to be a blank and stony cliff. The cliff opened soundlessly when the woman held up her hand before an object so tiny only The Shadow could have seen it—a miniature electric eye. The woman stepped through the opening. The two guards stationed in their black uniforms just inside the door watched her, and blinked, stared. Something—her shadow?—seemed to slide inside with her as the door sighed shut. The two guards stepped forward in the dim antechamber inside the door. Then they blinked, rubbed their eyes, and shrugged—they could see nothing. They returned to their posts, and the woman proceeded down the corridor into a maze of bright steel-lined corridors.

She moved quickly along the unguarded corridors—unguarded by human guards, but scanned by radar and television. The woman never glanced behind her, there was no need—anything or anyone in the corridors unau-

thorized would instantly set off alarms. Anyone or anything but The Shadow, whose fiery and alert eyes, seeing the mechanical and electronic devices, concentrated the powers of his mind into an impenetrable screen around his black gliding shape, and passed undetected along the silent corridors behind the woman.

The Richards woman, tall and slender in her black uniform with its white circle of CYPHER and the rank of group leader, stood before the hulking man seated behind the desk. The giant man, almost seven feet tall and well over three hundred pounds of solid muscle, sat on a raised chair behind the long desk covered with electronic instruments and dials. The room was bathed in dim red light.

"Report, Group Leader 12," the deep voice of the giant said.

The hulking giant wore the black uniform with the circle of CYPHER, and the rank of area leader. In addition, on the black CYPHER uniform, the area leader wore the insignia of a British Commando—and on his head the green beret of the British Commando. His deep voice had the clipped accents of the professional British soldier. As the Richards woman began to speak, the giant area leader touched a switch and a tape recorder began to whir.

"From the begining," the giant said. "Permanent client file."

"Of course," the woman said. "Group Leader 12 reporting on initial campaign for Client 407-AB. Group Leader 12 personally acting as account executive for this account. Initial campaign confined to city of Santa Carla, with statewide extensions. Class A account, full murder and protection coverage."

The giant nodded. "A prime client. Proceed."

The Richards woman bowed her head slightly. "Initial progress excellent. Crime war established by Mayor Rush, five murders performed according to specifications to arouse public interest and indignation. Results positive, generally well received. No possible clues left, blame

placed on organized crime in Santa Carla with particular suspicion falling on the Mafia."

"Victims chosen at random to arouse maximum suspicion Mafiawise?" the area leader asked, his face muted in the dim light.

"Yes sir."

"Good."

"Client was pleased with initial progress. Maximum fear citizenwise, spontaneous suggestion of crime commission by citizens committee and district attorney. Second stage of the campaign was ready for implementation when unforeseen negative action occurred in account requiring immediate ad lib reaction from account executive."

"Second stage was to be murder of district attorney, blame to be placed on organized crime?" the area leader snapped.

"Check," the woman said.

"I trust the unforeseen action could not have been foreseen and planned for by account executive?" the area leader said ominously.

"Area leader may judge from report," the woman said drily. "Said unforeseen action consisted of client's associate, namely Mayor Rush of Santa Carla, having meeting with Penny Bell. During the course of this meeting, Mayor Rush allowed the Bell girl to learn some of client's plans! Later the girl telephoned District Attorney Drake Hind!

"Mayor Rush overheard her. Unfortunately, instead of at once alerting his CYPHER client man, as per instructions, the mayor panicked and killed the girl. His client man heard the shots and instantly alerted the account executive, myself. As it chanced, I was at that moment with one Jimmy Faust, Santa Carla Mafia leader, and one of his men, Vito Maggiore. Faust was scheduled to be blamed for the murder of District Attorney Hind, and I was preparing the groundwork.

"When I was alerted to the urgent emergency I was forced to ad lib, play it by ear. I immediately hypnotized both Mafia men. Transport took Faust to the motel by motorcycle. Faust was in the motel room before the po-

lice came, and I had him killed with Mayor Rush's gun, and removed the body of the Bell girl.

"When the police arrived they easily accepted the story that Mayor Rush had come to a meeting with Faust and had killed Faust in self-defense. However, Lieutenant Joseph Moss of the Santa Carla Police was not quite satisfied. The owner of the motel, one Max Goleta, had reported a woman killed. Therefore, the next day I impersonated the Bell girl and explained her presence."

There was a silence. The hulking area leader stared at the Richards woman. At last he nodded in the shadowy room.

"Good, Group Leader 12. The action of Mayor Rush could not have been foreseen, you acted with speed and skill."

"Thank you, Area Leader," the woman said. "Naturally, I also had to stop Drake Hind. He was on his way to the motel as a result of the Bell woman's call. Since he was on our schedule to be murdered, I merely advanced the murder and trapped him on the street. Two mobile units handled him, and left the other Mafia man, Vito Maggiore, at the scene. He was promptly arrested. The net result was that our timetable had been disrupted, but the final outcome was consistent with our objective for the client. The deaths caused the crime commission to be established, and we then proceeded according to schedule."

"The Mafia was blamed for all actions?"

"Completely. As Allen Richards I made sure of this. Of course, as always, certain minor problems continued to develop. Lieutenant Moss was still not quite convinced of the events at the El Capitan, so, to save time, I eliminated him personally. The Mafia, of course, were actively attempting to learn what was happening. They reached the motel owner, Max Goleta, so I had him killed also.

"The major problem turned out to be an assistant to one of the crime commission members, a man named Lamont Cranston. It seems that this Cranston is a wealthy man who has an amateur organization. He is a shrewd man. He began to track the Bell woman. I was forced to use Cypherine-Z to render the Bell woman's husband in-

sane. Her body, of course, had been brought down here by the usual route.

"This Cranston was also on the trail of the Mafia, so I was forced to prevent his contacting them. However, he seems to be a remarkably able man, or very lucky. I made one attempt to kill him, but failed. He managed to contact the Mafia, and to learn that Mayor Rush was involved in something more than a self-defense killing at the motel. That left me no choice but to trap him at the mountain lodge. Since he now knows who I am, and that CYPHER exists, I have brought him and his secretary here under hypnosis."

The hulking Area Leader nodded. "We will dispose of them. Meanwhile, you must return to Santa Carla at once. I don't like an account executive away from the account too long. You have acted well under emergency conditions, the client is pleased and the account secure. However, I have been in communication with your assistant in Santa Carla, and the situation is in need of reevaluation. As a result of the actions of this Cranston and his assistants, the mayor and the Mafia people are under arrest."

The woman was thoughtful. "Then the mayor will have to be discredited. The client can no longer operate the plan through him. Alternate campaign B must be used."

"Precisely," the giant area leader agreed. "The client himself will have to be built to the image. In many ways that is actually the superior plan. You will recall, Group Leader 12, that it was my initial client suggestion. He wished to remain behind the scenes, but now he has no choice."

"No, and I agree that it is really more functional that way," the woman group leader 12 said. "I will return with the new plan at once."

"The sooner the better. I'd like to see this account settled as soon as possible, we have other accounts for you. You know how important it is to keep our billing up. Never too long on a single account. Do the campaign, and leave it to the client, that is how CYPHER was built. Take our fee and leave the profits of the operation to the client, that is our strength. We must remain what we are—a service organization only. That way we remain

unknown, and the client never fears us as competition."

"I'm aware of our organizational principles, Area Leader," the woman said coldly.

"My apologies," the area leader said. He watched the woman who did not turn to leave. "You have something else on your mind?"

The woman frowned. "This Cranston. There is one strange thing. I said he had an organization. When I was forced to handle Lieutenant Moss, I was almost caught by a peculiar man wearing a black cape and slouch hat. A very strange man who was able to jump out a two-storey window the same as I was. I eluded him, of course, but he puzzles me. Some associate of Cranston in disguise, I imagine. I think you had better try to get information from this Cranston before he is negated."

"Your suggestion is well taken, Group Leader 12. I will take care of it. Now I suggest you return to Santa Carla, and I expect a speedy and efficient wrapup of the campaign for the client."

"Yes, Area Leader," the woman said, saluted, turned and walked out through a street door that silently opened and closed.

Left alone in his client office, the hulking area leader sat behind his desk and slowly rubbed his massive chin. He pressed a button on his desk and listened again to the entire report of the woman group leader 12. Then he nodded approvingly, and shut off his machine. In the dim red light of the silent office the giant stood up and turned toward the wall behind him.

An eerie laugh filled the dim room. A weird, chilling laugh that made the hulking man in the green commando beret turn quickly with a pistol already in his hand.

The giant blinked—there was nothing he could see in the room.

17

THE CHILLING laugh rose higher, colder, echoing through the red and black shadows of the room.

"Who laughs? Where are you!" the hulking area leader hissed, his pistol ready, his great body alert and tensed as his eyes searched the dim corners of the room.

"You wish to see me, Area Leader?" a harsh, powerful voice said. "Then look!"

As if from a cloud, from the floor itself, the great black shape of The Shadow seemed to suddenly appear before the staring giant. Beneath the wide slouch hat the two fiery eyes burned as they fixed on the hulking man's face. The fire-opal girasol glowed red in the red-lighted room. The hulking giant swore.

"The man in black! Who . . . ?"

"Men call me The Shadow, and I avenge all evil! You are an evil man, Area Leader! The Shadow knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men!"

The giant raised his pistol. "You know too much! I don't know how you got here, but you won't leave. You . . ."

The Shadow's laugh filled the room with its weird chill.

"Do not try to shoot! You cannot shoot! You cannot move a muscle! You cannot think."

The giant pointed his pistol. His finger tightened. Nothing happened. The giant swore, tried to pull the trigger, but his fingers would not move. He blinked, rubbed his eyes with his left hand. A thick cloud covered his mind. He fought, but the cloud rolled inexorably into his brain, stripping his will, turning his mind blank to all but the blazing eyes and the chilling voice in front of him in the dim room of red light.

"You will sit down! You will tell me what I ask!" The Shadow commanded, his fiery eyes burning through the shadowy room.

The giant sat down. He placed his pistol on the desk. His hands lay flat on the desk, unmoving.

"Who are you?" The Shadow demanded, his voice now soft but like a steel spring.

The hulking giant blinked. "Area Leader 6, Cypher Command, North America."

"Who were you?"

"Captain Gerald McVicker, Royal Marine Commandos. I was cashiered. The court-martial convicted me. Disobeying orders. The weak fools! Those Communists deserved to die!"

"Who is Group Leader 12?"

"We do not use names. Her code name is Richards, Miriam Richards. Former major of the *Irgun Ha'n Zvi.* She killed four Arabs after the war ended so was discharged. She then joined with us."

"Both soldiers, both killers?" The Shadow intoned, his eyes watching the hulking giant. He remembered all the varied faces of the CYPHER men who had captured Cranston.

The Shadow watched the man. "What is CYPHER?"

The giant hesitated. His face and body twisted as if in some titanic struggle. The Shadow watched him and guessed that the man was programmed against ever answering this question. But no programming could resist the power of The Shadow. The hulking ex-Commando writhed in agony, but at last his cracked voice spoke.

"CYPHER is a service organization. We work on fee, we do not share in client affairs. We do our work and we leave, we never blackmail or interfere. We are hired for a service contract, we do our account."

"Fees for what, Gerald McVicker!"

"Our services include murder, complete disposal of all evidence including the bodies. Kidnaping. We will spy, assassinate, supply bodies to replace other bodies. We will supply any force a client needs, protect the client, eliminate his enemies, arrange any form of crime he wants done without his participation or involvement. If required we can supply a battle force. We have full facilities to offer all forms of violence in the service of a client. We will plan a complete campaign if the client supplies

the ultimate result he desires. Efficiency guaranteed, our fee is inclusive, no extras and no followup."

Even The Shadow felt a cold chill inside. CYPHER! Nothing! An organization of negation. An International Violence For Hire. An organization with no connection to either its clients or its victims, ruthless and efficient and completely organized. An agency of all violence—for a fee and no more. All but undetectable by ordinary police methods. Staffed by people with powers like those of the woman Israeli, Miriam Richards!

"Violence for hire!" The Shadow said. "Murder as a service! The depths of evil grow deeper and deeper!"

"An efficient service," the giant McVicker said. "All trained men, the best. We've got ex-Chinese Communist murder teams; American Special Forces misfits; some old Smersh men; Algerian terror team veterans; old Nazi soldiers; French officers disgusted with their weak leaders. The best—all trained, efficient. We give them a chance to use their skills, and we pay well. Everyone uses us because they know we take our fee and leave. That's the way our men like it. They like their work, and we give them plenty of work."

The Shadow's glowing eyes seemed to bathe the boasting giant in a redder glow than the room. "And what is your campaign for Client 407-AB?"

Again the hulking man writhed inside the cloud that filled his mind. McVicker battled beneath the cloud, aware that there were things he must not tell, had been programmed never to reveal, but under the cloud of The Shadow's power he had to tell.

"To create a crime war in Santa Carla so that an outside crime commission would be brought in. Then, when the mayor defeated the Mafia, he would be a hero and run for governor. With the mayor in control of the state, our client could operate all forms of crime within the state and milk it dry."

The eyes of The Shadow flashed in anger. So! There it was! No more nor less than a ruthless attempt to corrupt and take over an entire state for personal profit! There were times when The Shadow despaired, the evil grew

greater and greater each year in a world where morality waned each year.

"The name of your client!" The Shadow demanded.

The ex-commando battled, his face contorted with the effort. The thick face of the giant grew red with the inner conflict. His programmed will battled the cloud over his mind and the power of the will of The Shadow. His whole giant body seemed to suddenly tremble.

"I . . . I . . ." the giant ex-commando stammered. "His name . . . the client . . ."

The sharp explosion shattered the silence of the dim red room. A small explosion, like a rifle shot.

McVicker stiffened, uttered a single hoarse cry, and fell across his desk.

The Shadow glided swiftly across the dim room to bend over the fallen giant. His eyes glowed as he inspected the man. McVicker was dead. The fingers of The Shadow found the small wound directly over the man's heart—a destructive device implanted beneath the skin!

The Shadow stood over the body, his eyes burning as he knew what had happened. Programmed to never answer such questions as The Shadow had asked, the dead area leader had had a destruct device implanted that was triggered by the rise in blood pressure caused by conflict inside. In case McVicker was ever placed under drugs or any other device that sapped his will to resist, that operated against the programming of his mind, his blood pressure would rise under the strain of the conflict of interest until the device operated and ended the battle by silencing him forever.

But in the case of the hulking giant the device had partially failed because the tremendous strength of the giant had held down the blood pressure until the last instant! The device had not been sensitive enough for so big a man! An error by CYPHER that had given The Shadow much of what he had to know, but the Avenger was not pleased. He should have suspected such a device from an organization of assassins! Now he had more work before . . .

The Shadow became rigid in the dim room.

Far off, faint and distant, he heard a strange sound. A rising and falling wail. An alarm!

The Shadow whirled to the hidden door. The room was sound-proof, but the super hearing of The Shadow heard the distant alarm. CYPHER was as efficient as they claimed. There was only one explanation for the alarm—they had an alarm system geared to their leader—McVicker! His sudden death had triggered the alarm. The Shadow had no time to lose.

Swiftly he crossed to the door, concentrating the powers of his mind until the door sprang open, its controls operated by the powers of The Shadow. He glided through into the bright corridor. At the far end of the corridor a horde of men were running toward the hidden red room! They saw him.

"There! Get him!"

In the brief second that he saw them, he recognized the faces of at least a dozen nationalities, the insignia on the black uniforms from at least a dozen countries. They were armed and already firing. Drawing his automatics, The Shadow laid down a destructive fire that brought them all to a diving, scrambling halt all along the corridor. In that brief second of respite, The Shadow vanished back through the door, his mind focusing its full power to jam the electronic controls.

In the room he dashed to the opposite wall behind the desk. He leaped over the body of the fallen McVicker, and his powers opened the door behind the desk. He dashed through, and jammed this door behind him. He stood in a dim and narrow corridor—the second exit he knew had to be there, the emergency escape an efficient organization had to have. He floated like a great black bird along the dim corridor until he found the exit. This exit led into a small, dank stone room with a flight of iron steps upward. At the top of the steps The Shadow emerged into the shadows of the jungle.

He stood on the side of the mountain above the camouflaged cover of the CYPHER Base. Below he could hear the shouts and chaos of the alerted base, the alarm still wailing its warning. Far off in the sky he saw the faint shape of a DC-3 flying away north. His eyes flashed

as he realized that in that plane was the Richards woman returning to complete her work in Santa Carla. But below another DC-3 rested on the landing strip. Swiftly, The Shadow glided downward through the thick jungle, a shadow moving unseen among shadows.

He came out among the low square buildings under the dim light of the camouflage cover. Inside the mountain he could hear the shouts of the search. Without pause the black-garbed crimefighter moved unseen by the alarmed CYPHER soldiers until he reached the building where they held Margo. As he prepared to enter, the dark-haired woman came out, a long pistol in her hand. She smiled as she saw him.

"The alarm sent them running," Margo said simply. "I picked the lock. When they came back I was waiting. They won't bother us, Chief. I borrowed one of their weapons. I knew you would be here soon."

"Very good, Margo. Now we must hurry!"

Without more words, The Shadow picked up the dark-haired woman, and seemed to flow as swift as some moving shape of light itself across the dim ground toward the DC-3 waiting on the runway. Unseen by the panicked soldiers of CYPHER, he reached the edge of the cover and emerged into the Mexican sunlight. In the open now, he was seen.

There was a great shout behind.

The Shadow stopped and turned.

A horde of black-uniformed Cypher soldiers poured from the entrance into the mountain and reached the edge of the open runway. The Shadow reached into his robes and brought out two small round objects. He hurled them high to fall directly in the path of the advancing enemy.

The two mighty explosions rocked the mountains. The Shadow swept up Margo and raced on toward the DC-3 without a single look backward to see where the CYPHER soldiers lay in smoking, screaming heaps on the smashed earth. Three men leaped from the DC-3. The Shadow's automatic blazed in his free hand, and all three men fell in the hail of accurate fire. The Shadow

leaped over their bodies, his black cloak flying out, and disappeared into the DC-3 with Margo.

Behind, the forces of CYPHER regrouped and came on. But they were too late now. The DC-3 roared down the runway and into the air, and the chilling laugh of The Shadow floated back to mock the men of CYPHER.

Inside the plane, The Shadow at the controls, Margo looked back and down. The dark-haired girl was grim and angry.

"Shouldn't we destroy them?" Margo asked.

"We will, Margo, but we have more urgent work in Santa Carla!" the Avenger said harshly.

Then, as the DC-3 gained altitude and turned north, there was a gigantic explosion behind them. The mountain, camouflage, and buildings vanished in a wall of flame, smoke and earth. The Shadow's eyes burned grimly.

"They have destroyed the base. They are efficient, Margo, but they will not destroy Santa Carla!"

The hawklike face of the black-shrouded Avenger turned to face north toward the distant city as the DC-3 flew on.

18

WHEN LAMONT CRANSTON and Margo Lane walked into the conference room of the crime commission in the Santa Carla Courthouse, they met a scene of calm, efficient activity. Commissioner Weston was the first to greet them.

"Lamont! Margo! We were afraid you were . . ."

"Dead?" Cranston said, a small smile on his quiet face. "No, Commissioner, but we came very close. Who reported our death? Richards?"

Chairman Bailey strode forward, his hand out. "Glad to see you, Cranston! Yes, Richards said the Mafia got you up in the Sierra Del Norte! We were going to send a unit."

Cranston frowned. "A unit?"

Morgan Slater looked up from the long table where he worked over a large map of Santa Carla and vicinity. "A unit of the State Guard. We've got them mobilized. State Troopers, too. May even get some help from the Federal Government. We're really going to wipe out crime here once and for all! In the whole state!"

"Where is Richards?" Cranston asked.

Bailey looked around. "He was here. Must have stepped out. A good man, Richards."

Bauermann came around the table. "He told us all about this other outfit, Cranston. Call themselves CYPHER. That was the people the mayor and the Mafia were working with. But we'll get them all now."

"We're going to wipe out all of them, Lamont," Weston said. "The governor and the whole state are behind us. The crime commission is the real power here now, and they've given us all the help we need."

Cranston's hooded eyes watched Bauermann and Weston. "You two also? I thought you were not sure?"

Bauermann was grim. "That was before Mayor Rush. Imagine, the mayor himself involved with the criminals! I wish he'd lived long enough to talk."

"The mayor is dead?" Cranston snapped.

Bauermann nodded. "Killed himself in his cell. Richards found him."

Slater looked up again. "Where is Richards? I need his help laying out the coverage of the city."

Cranston watched them all from behind his sleepy eyelids. He had a strong suspicion that "Richards" was not far away, but that the private investigator, alias Group Leader 12, CYPHER Command, would not show himself just yet. It was also fairly easy to guess how Mayor Rush had committed "suicide." But Cranston said nothing, not yet. He still had a "client" to find.

Commissioner Weston looked at Cranston and Margo. The Commissioner seemed to sense something. "What did happen to you, Lamont?"

"You know, Commissioner," Cranston said quietly, "I'm not quite sure."

Margo was startled. "Lamont, I . . ."

"No," Cranston said. "We don't really know."

Bailey raised a white eyebrow. "You don't know?"

Morgan Slater stopped his work to stare at Cranston and Margo. Samuel Bauermann seemed to watch them narrowly. Even Weston seemed perplexed. Cranston passed his hands across his eyes and shook his head.

"We were hypnotized in that mountain lodge," Cranston explained. "That was probably why Richards thought we were dead. After that we don't remember a thing until this morning. We woke up somewhere in Mexico, some kind of hidden airfield and headquarters. I don't quite know what actually happened, but someone released us and we managed to get away in that DC-3 we flew in with. The whole place blew up behind us. I alerted the Mexican authorities, of course, but I doubt if they will find anything. I think it was part of this CYPHER outfit."

"Someone released you?" Slater said. "That's all you know?"

Cranston nodded, passed his hand over his eyes again. "I think we were still half hypnotized. I seem to remember some kind of black shape, but it's all hazy."

Bailey swore softly. "Yes, Richards said this CYPHER is an international gang. We'll take them on after we clean up the city."

Weston seemed worried. "A black shape, Lamont. That sounds like The Shadow!"

Bauermann looked at Weston. "The Shadow?"

"Yes, I've had vague dealings with a kind of man in black before. I don't know who or what he is. Some kind of criminal, I'm afraid. Still, he has somehow helped me at times. Many times when some big criminal organization has been broken he seems to have been there, but we've never caught him."

"We'll catch them all this time," Bauermann said. "Come on, Morgan we have work to do."

"That's all you can tell us, Cranston?" Morgan Slater asked.

"I'm afraid so," Cranston said quietly.

"Too bad," Bailey said. "But first things first. We have

Santa Carla to clean up. The whole state is behind us after what we learned about the mayor."

Cranston nodded. "You'll be heroes, I imagine."

"Not unless we get to work," Slater said.

Bailey nodded. The chairman turned again to Cranston. "You look very tired, Cranston. Why don't you get some rest? We've got a lot of work. The governor will be here this evening, we want to have it all ready for him."

Cranston nodded. "I think you may be right. We are tired, and our work is about finished. Come, Margo."

The socialite and his secretary left the busy conference room where all the commission members were already back at the work of mapping the anticrime war before Cranston and Margo had gone out the door. In the corridor and elevator, Cranston was silent and Margo said nothing. On the street, where the citizens were gathered in groups talking excitedly about the war against crime, they walked to the waiting Rolls-Royce where Stanley sat behind the wheel of the new car. Once inside, Margo turned to her chief.

"Lamont, it's all going the way CYPHER planned it! We know there is no crime wave in Santa Carla."

"Yes, Margo, we know and *so does one of those men!* One of those men is the client of CYPHER."

"One of them? Which one, Lamont?"

"I think I know, and I think I know what is going to happen next, but I am not sure, Margo."

The dark-haired woman watched Cranston. "What are we going to do?"

"Trap him, Margo. And not us, but The Shadow. The Shadow is going to end this evil tonight!"

In the back seat of the Rolls-Royce the hooded eyes of the socialite flashed the power of The Shadow as Stanley drove away through the milling crowds already waiting to cheer the governor and the heroes of the crime commission.

The window of the dim evening room four stories above the city of Santa Carla was open. A man stood at the window. In his hands the man held a long, deadly rifle fitted with a telescopic sight. The man watched the street be-

low where the police held back the crowds waiting to greet the governor as his car passed on its way to the courthouse.

Ten minutes passed.

There were sudden shouts in the street below.

At the window the man knelt and aimed his rifle. His finger tightened on the trigger. He squeezed the trigger. The shot rang out clear in the evening.

But the shot did not find its mark.

The instant before the man squeezed the trigger something seemed to reach out and pull the barrel of the rifle up. The shot struck harmlessly against the building across the street. But the shot had been heard, and below in the street there was pandemonium. People screamed and pointed upward.

In the room the man swore and whirled.

A chilling laugh rose high above all the noise below in the street.

A macabre, eerie laugh that filled the room where the man had whirled.

"Who the devil . . . !"

The laugh came again. "The devil is inside you!" a voice intoned from the shifting dimness of the evening room high above the city.

The Shadow appeared, his fiery eyes glowing beneath the wide brim of the slouch hat, his great black shape fading away into the dark corners.

"You! The man in black!"

"Yes, The Shadow! Your evil game is ended!"

The man stared, laughed. "Game? What game? What are you, some insane fool? What game?"

The laugh of The Shadow rose high, cold. "The game of power! The game of owning this state! You planned it all—to own this state by electing the mayor to be governor! But he failed, and you decided to be governor yourself. With the governor dead, who would be the only hero in this state? The only man who, on the fame of his battle against all crime in this city, would be the popular hero and would be easily elected governor! Only one man could do that—the chairman of the crime commission!"

Walter Bedsole Bailey swore and lunged across the dim

room at the shape of The Shadow. He crashed against a wall, The Shadow gone. From another corner the laugh of The Shadow mocked Bailey. The chairman lunged again, swung his rifle like a club. He hit empty air and crashed against another wall. The Shadow mocked.

"You are the only man rich enough to pay CYPHER. You are the chairman of the crime commission. With the governor dead, you would be the hero of the state. You are the only commission member who lives in this state!"

"Lies! All lies! You can prove nothing!" the distinguished chairman cried, his face contorted with rage.

"I have the CYPHER files, Walter Bailey! I can prove what I charge! Richards will talk!"

The chairman paled. "Files? You . . ."

Suddenly Bailey raised the rifle and fired at the two eyes that glowed at him from across the room.

The Shadow laughed.

"I'll kill you! I'll destroy you! Mine, you hear, all mine! This state is mine! I will own this state! I will bleed the fools dry! I, Walter Bedsole Bailey! I am superior! I will rule!"

The old man charged through the room, slashing at the air, at the shadows, with the rifle. The laughter of The Shadow mocked him from everywhere and nowhere.

Bailey stopped. Exhausted, the chairman stood there. Already voices were coming up from below. The Shadow moved closer, the power of his mind reaching out to cloud the mind of the chairman. Bailey stood, shuddered, as the power clouded through his reeling brain.

"You will confess, Walter Bailey!" The Shadow commanded.

The chairman nodded. "Yes, I will confess. I will tell all I know. I planned it, I hired CYPHER, I . . ."

The two shots spat out. Soft, spitting sounds in the dim room. Bailey gasped, fell backward against a wall, and pitched forward onto his face.

The Shadow whirled and glided swiftly to the door. Voices were coming close from below. But The Shadow looked upward. A figure raced away up the stairs in the gloom of the twilight hallway. The Shadow raced upward in pursuit.

The chase went on in silence. Up the stairs ten flights to the roof of the building. There, in the twilight, The Shadow glided out onto the roof and saw the figure of the killer across the roof. The figure of an old man who ran with the speed of a racer across the roof toward the edge and the roof of the next building. As The Shadow came out, the old man fired. The mocking laughter of The Shadow echoed through the twilight.

The old man raced across the roof of the next building. The Shadow bounded in pursuit like a great black bird of prey in the growing darkness. The silent chase continued high above the city until the old man ahead reached the edge of a building that did not touch the next building. The Shadow laughed again. The old man turned and fired twice, two short silenced shots, and then turned again and leaped. A long, impossible leap. The old man made the leap and ran on. The Shadow leaped without a pause, his great cloak flying out behind him in the air.

And then there were no more buildings.

At the edge of a roof high above the street, the old man turned to face The Shadow.

But it was no longer an old man who faced The Shadow as the black-garbed Avenger glided close in the falling night.

The beautiful woman in the green dress, Miriam Richards, alias Allen Richards, alias a thousand shapes and faces, alias Group Leader 12, CYPHER Command, faced The Shadow in the deepening twilight.

"So, we meet again," the woman said.

The eyes of The Shadow blazed. "We do, Miriam Richards!"

"Group Leader 12, CYPHER Command!" the woman snapped. "And you?"

"I am called The Shadow. I destroy all evil."

The woman laughed. "No, I think not, Shadow! Perhaps you can frighten a fool like Bailey, but not me."

"You killed Bailey to silence him?"

"Of course. The weakling would have talked. No one lives to tell of CYPHER. Now it is your turn, my black-caped friend!"

The beautiful woman's eyes blazed out. The power of

her eyes, and her skill and training, bored into the fiery eyes of The Shadow.

The Shadow laughed his wild, eerie laugh.

The woman seemed to shiver, to gather all her will, to concentrate on the great black figure before her on the silent roof. The Avenger laughed again, his voice mocking in the twilight above the city.

"You know of the Master Chen T'a Tze," The Shadow said softly as his eyes burned into the woman. "Then you know of his ultimate power!"

For one instant the eyes of the woman flared in a final effort, but the shape of The Shadow mocked her, and then she seemed to stagger. She seemed to hear the words of The Shadow.

"The ultimate . . . power!" she said, gasped. "Then you . . ."

Fear appeared in the eyes of the beautiful woman. Perhaps the first fear she had ever felt. The power of The Shadow reached out now like long, soft fingers entering her mind. Thin, soft fingers with the strength of steel that reached to grip and cloud her reeling mind.

With a sudden, final effort, she hurled herself backward and over the edge.

She fell to the street ten stories below without a scream or a sound.

On the roof The Shadow glided to the edge and looked over. Below people were running toward her smashed form.

The Shadow's final laugh of revenge floated out over the darkening city.

A week later, Santa Carla almost returned to normal with the State Guard gone and the police in charge again, the crime commission held its final session. The Mafia men were all in jail, the crime wave that had never existed was ended.

"Bailey had a file in his office on the whole plan," Morgan Slater said. "It was a diabolical plot, and it might have worked. The mayor, or Bailey, would have been a certain winner in any election after they'd whipped up all that hysteria."

"It would have worked if that Penny Bell girl hadn't informed," Weston said.

"Bailey had everything organized. As soon as he or the mayor were governor, he was ready to sell every crime activity in the state to people who would work with him and pay him!" Bauermann said. "He must have been insane!"

"Yes," Lamont Cranston said. "Insane."

"Do you think we'll ever find Allen Richards?" Morgan Slater said. "I suppose he was working with Bailey."

"And who was that dead woman? She had the gun on her that killed Bailey," Weston said.

Bauermann was thoughtful. "One thing I don't understand in all of this. You mentioned that a black figure helped you in Mexico, Cranston. And the people who saw that woman fall from the roof say they saw a giant black shape high up on the roof, and heard a weird laugh."

Cranston smiled. "There are many things we don't know in this world, Mr. Bauermann."

"But I wonder why she fell?" Slater said.

"Afraid of shadows, perhaps," Margo said.

Margo smiled and looked at the impassive face of Lamont Cranston. Cranston smiled in return as they prepared to leave Santa Carla, the work here finished. But in Cranston's mind this time, in the mind of The Shadow, was when he would meet CYPHER next. Because he knew that he would meet CYPHER again. Somewhere, CYPHER and The Shadow would do battle once more.

THE END

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The Shadow knows. . . .

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